

THE BLAZING FIELD

by

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Master of Arts
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ABSTRACT

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Drawing from the perhaps antithetical languages provided by myth and science, the poems in this collection examine how women become socially constructed through cultural narratives. Toward this end, the poems question women's bodies as culturally scripted boundaries by reimagining Greco-Roman myths of bodily transformation. At times, this questioning occurs through a contemporary speaker's relationship with her scientist father as she seeks to understand different modes of knowledge and the consequences of these modes on how we establish connection to others, the world, and ourselves. Underlying these themes rests the question of how language and utterance form the boundary of a gendered body.

Graf Zeppelin Over Siberia

Beneath the body lie packed fields of snow,
blue molecules grinding to silence, white
ridges. Where gray convenes, disjointed mountains
rise from the tundra's flank. And we rise,
or are risen, the body's shadow clinging
like ice to stern. Through corridors, canals
of ushered light, we breathe complacently
ascending hollow as a silver cup
to the sky's metallic mouth. Illusive vessel.

I count the days that pass in this dusk.
The sun casts placid glances against the cold.
If we are the short day, both sun and shade,
both port and passage, we neither cease to turn
nor press ourselves to motion. Rotation keeps us
where we belong. The villagers look up
and pray. They've fallen to their knees. For one
moment we circle them, our solid body
a blot, a blight, then gone. The winter's hard
as winter. The elk still scuff the permafrost
for thrusts of roots. The villagers return
to stone or snow. From here, we can't discern
so deeply frozen. We don't know the length
thaw runs or how to turn the mind
back. It could be a thousand feet below
the people build their homes from clouds. What color
is coldest when its space allows. What distance.

The engine's hum reminds the passengers
of what they once called wind. Donning furs,
they appear like arctic foxes peeping out
the ports. The mountains grow from dusty hills.
We barely clear the peaks, the pinnacles
conspire toward our bloated shape. A prick—
the white horizon folds itself in half
just to press a point. And then we glide
beyond the tundra—tips of green, the taiga
rushes upward. This body flushes with color.

I

Charon's Obol

My father gave me a small jar of honey
and each night I took a secret lick.
Long after the gold hardened to granule
my tongue returned to my mouth sweet.
Later he placed between my lips a sliver of peach
or a white pastille
dissolving down—a homeopathic moon.
I kept my tongue clean beneath those gifts.

My tongue has since turned.
Sliding against the edges of men,
I wonder where that gold's gotten to
and settle for a boy who tastes of copper,
who flaps like a whiskey-watered hawk
and scatters me.
I know you don't mean it—I'd repeated,
until he refused me passage in his horror.
Empty anther. I wash him off with mint.
His sorrys fill my bed until I'm crowded out.
I count them like coin and at night they rattle.

We hope sounds will open our mouths
and force us into breath. I place a coin
across my tongue and practice dying.
In some cold places, the obol staves
return. My lips seal in the acerbic promise;
whole rivers run through me.
How can I know which boat to board—
I'm just trying to pay my way.

He removes the coin from my mouth
with his own hand. My sordid god.
But this is nothing new, this reaching into
and withdrawing. The truth is
I'd tongue the honey from most any hand
that granted me a crossing.

Ars Mythos

Like women, birds
are bad news.

They come with cutting
vanes and steel

rachis. Hercules
shot the Stymphalian,

but not before
they'd shed their swords

and wormed their beaks
into the farmers' lush

bodies. Here every
suffering will be made

visible or at least
not written out.

Consider how after
Procne's husband

rapes her sister,
she serves him their son's

flesh. One body
entering another

in reprisal for the same.
All characters of this myth

live the remainder
of their sufferings as birds.

Sister as nightingale—
symbol of scored

silence. The husband
under the tarnished crown

of an orange crested

An Inventory of Margaret Cavendish's Laboratory

An outside. An inside.

One can assume salt in a rough wet mouth.

Her father's house was not far from the sea.

An orange removed from under the hand's heel—

pressure at two poles.

A cut in the damp air. Light like a rind crescent.

It is impossible to round this world.

The boats ride on the waves in a geometry

of hollowed cells. *Honeycomb.*

A scientific animal. A crushed telescope.

Charcoal. Pipette nettle.

A privation of light. A fiction rattles in the centrifuge.

Bear-men. Bird-men. An emperor.

A bowl of seeds and a scalpel. A hypothesis.

A particular part cannot increase of itself.

The frozen men on long silver counters.

Cross-sections of stone.

Preface

Wait. Place your hand
 inside your pocket, where a nickel
 meets you hard as a memory
where under your thumb the face
 will lose relief and the year
 wear down to almost nothing
 just an alloy of sweat and callus.

Wait. The earth falls
 now. Wait. The sun rotates. Wait.
 The moment will break itself
 against you and leave. Wait
in this cradle of copper
 and candle wax. This—
 you call this home. And yet,
 the morning hasn't yet lifted
the frost off the grass and the road leads to a road
 leads to a fence
 leads to a country
 leads to your hand
clutched in your pocket like a key.

A Taxonomy of Spheres in My Father's Office

I twist the doorknob and hope my father
is not busy. He sits at his desk and I exit

the hallway. The room holds everything
it will hold this year. My father is organizing

a course on the biology of reduction.
He asks me to wait on the beige couch.

Above my head hangs a newspaper clipping;
my father in the Sunday cartoons

for keeping a grapefruit on his desk. His black hair
intrudes through other frames. After three years,

the grapefruit shrank to the size of a circle.
In another panel, a man and woman have been

married for a very long time A philodendron grows up
the window and through a ceiling tile from its clay pot.

When my father switches offices, he clips the vine back
to its base. Currently, it covers half the flecked ceiling.

I draw a regression of rabbits on the whiteboard
under the word *sphingosene kinase*, which divides

into *catalyst enzyme* and *lipid*. The coffee-maker sits in a stain.
There's another frame on the wall. Ansel Adam's *Moon*

and *Half Dome*. I have years to learn—
my father is less interested in the whole

than in how the whole goes wrong.
Carbonation pings in a soda can and condensation

trickles down my index finger to the carpet,
looks, for a moment, like an hourglass, then sinks in.

Deconstructed

At sixteen, I told the oral surgeon—
slice. The promise: a straight profile
and white picket teeth.

To help with headaches,
he widened the palette, moved
the bone on my chin as gift.

For six weeks, my teeth sealed shut
by cut muscle, I didn't speak.
Post-surgery

I dripped tie-dye into the body
of a gauze dragonfly to match
my green and blue skin.

When I ask for photographs,
my mother says there are none:
who wants a memory of silence.

One morning, skin so taught
over my swollen jaw, I peeled my lips
right off, a slough of white.

But I felt nothing. The nerves
were so damaged beneath my cheeks
they quit.

I still thumb the mark of numbness
where my chin dips,
but no touch reaches its surface.

In an X-ray of my head, six bolts
and screws star the white skull,
four on the upper jaw, and two

at the lower hinge,
each like something marking
the end of the sentence.

Aperture

I.

The fly fell on me like I was sugar. Whispered saccharine epithets into my ears: sweet-tongued Io, milk-river Io, Io of the honeycomb body. Be not wary of the tongues of Gods. Glory to she who succumbs. I abandoned the washing. I left the river to its run. The fly rubs grains of salt across my skin. Says openness its own reward.

II.

As a daughter I never strayed. As a Mother she never stopped watching. In summer, we picked plums. Father went to work before the flies rose and came home after they had died for the day. They hummed low to our picking. Plums slipped from our fingers, swallowed by the baskets. Later we cleaned them, Mother holding the pieces underwater. I was careful not to tear the purple skin with the polishing rag. At night, against the trees spreading like tails of peacocks to the sky, Father's car slunk home. He stepped out tired and wealthy. Her whole life, Mother never stopped tasting the white gravel road.

III.

I hear his eyes blink shut: drawers closing, paper falling, wings closing back on the body. The tree becomes a circle becomes a track becomes a way of becoming. Their leaves rustle: pages and doors drawing, turning, arms pulled to the chest. Am I captured in this open meadow. Am I free tethered to the olive tree. I sense my body shifting under the skin. Where have my hands gone. How to hold now to anything. Argus closes half his eyes and opens the others.

IV.

Eye-city. Eyes from the windows, the towers, the walls. Body pulled through windows, stretched across flanks, down fetlock, hock. Harden into hoof. The white gold of your hair runs heavy milk down your body. Cower, or coward, these streets belong to the boys with heavy eyes.

V.

I smelled course as clove. Cloven hooves leave split prints. I never was hidden. Hide became the thing I wore. He flew upon me. The flies like me best. I've transformed. He transformed me. I don't know my own mind. I raised my hands, but the light obscured them down to the wrist.

Helium

If Helios had begat a daughter, if
she'd asked to take his oiled reins, and if

he had refused her, saying helium
must fill her body, that her helium mind

would make her hands too soft to use
the metal on the horses' tongues;

if she took his horses anyway
and kept them trotting to a perfect curve,

would he forgive her as he did his son?
Her father's shredded by rays—she sees

the light particles divided by his teeth.
He asks again. But which question is he asking?

She could not lose control, the helium
dispersing slowly through wind blown

thoughts. Below, an airship bursts and burns.
She tries to catch his words before they're gone.

The horses rustle in their harnesses.

Aphagia

When I visit my father in his lab,
he instructs me not to touch anything;

the cells divide in their dishes,
the pipettes clink on the trays.

He shows me a cell under
the microscope, but the image

blurs at my hand's turn.
He says I'm watching autophagy,

the breakdown of a diseased
body. I can't focus the machine.

I forget the things he's told me,
how many cells we're made of,

how, to escape the draft for Vietnam,
he chewed only water for months.

I know that when Germany sent
airships, they split in the wind

or consumed themselves, like acids
biting through the intestinal lining.

Before we leave the sterile lab,
my father feeds his hungry cells

three drops of reddened sugar.

Consumption Triptych

I. Irene in the Portside Dining Room

Glasses spill
 when the spine tilts
past ten degrees,
 so the captain keeps
the clothed tables
 steady under seven,
the airship anchored
 in rolling oxygen.
Soup is served
 with silver ladles,
sole and parsley
 paired with a shivering
champagne flute.
 Cream and pear
complete the courses,
 and the passengers retire
or remove themselves
 to the smoking salon.
The Hindenburg doesn't hurry
 the hungry palate.
In a blue vase
 over the Atlantic,
carnations and chrysanthemum.
 No stirring our progression.
Think of that taste,
 such tart emptiness,
how it falls like flame
 and catches on your tongue.

II. Matilde at the Starboard Window

Paralyzed on the fire escape, I watch
Matilde pause at a sill of air to count
her children. They are gathered in the burning
lung. A sky glistens.

This city won't hold a stranger. An alarm
sounds from the roof and metal warms to my hands.
Matilde practices the transformation
of heat into life,

dropping her boys through the window, allowing
them to fall away, little bodies of rain.
I worry my body will let go of me.
My lungs are two fists

swinging at my chest. A looming black thorax,
Manhattan breathes out as I attempt to rise.
I'm poised between nothings, and coldly laddered
in in consequence,

opening fingers to the oxidized rung,
while Matilde wipes fire from her child's cheek
and lifts him through the portal, squeezing her hands
before letting go.

III. Margot in the Lair

On the abandoned bed of a lost school,
the wolf's taste tester samples asparagus,
fresh fruit, semolina dumplings, opening
the esophagus to this one-plate portion.
To make a trap of the body—she knows
how to lure the possibility of poison inside.
She raises her fork. But no foreign object
will eternally inhabit her. A dose of cyanide
or a silver bullet instead seeks his mouth—he
will administer his own end. Margot lifts her
fork. But silver kills only the fearful wolf
that drags his bone plate in front of a girl
and orders her to eat before taking his bite.

Synovial

I look at tools
as a matter
of chance, joints
fallen into
happy use,
but if pastern
and cannon part
ways, punctured
anatomy can't turn
the furrow.
When he split
his fetlock
between wood
wall and cement slab,
when he leaked
what makes
a comfortable life
I let him,
though now
I need
a soft fluid
to ease the motion.
I built my house
on a whip circled
hill, an empire
of brittle leather.
Well enough
to guide the cart,
I attend
the horse's coronation,
set flies to spin
his coronet,
and still reach
home by dark.

Osteoclasts

I.

Our bones remodel themselves all the time, my father says through the phone. He is explaining to me how

deer lose their antlers each spring and people break their knees and hips. Recently, I have thought of changing

my hair and my attitude toward the person I love. He sleeps far away from me now, and it would be less trouble

if my bones would rearrange him out of me. It is a relief to hear this may be possible. *The word comes from Greek, klastos,*

broken, he says. We don't notice the small fractures in our lives unless it is too late. Yet the way my father talks it is as though

no body is afraid of itself. I take comfort in knowing that part of me is made for self-destruction. That it is trying to be better.

II.

When my mother takes the phone she talks of osteoporosis.
She worries for my sister and herself and their unreparable

bones. She means their bones have lost mass. At twenty-five,
my mother stopped drinking alcohol. I am now twenty-five.

I didn't like who I was, she says, *who knows why your father stuck
with me*. I drink rarely and only in company. The man I loved

consumes himself far away from me now, yet I stay
cluttered by him. On the phone, my mother reminds me to drink

calcium. *But you are not built like your sister or like me*, she says.
I reject alcohol in the way I imagine poison ought to be rejected.

It reassures her that I am built like my father, who waited
until she could choose him over her desire for apathy.

My mother once fractured her wrist falling off her bike.
My mother once fractured her fibula from a long run.

My mother once fractured her spine from lifting the weight
of a patient who slipped and couldn't pick herself up.

I should have known better, my mother said of her method.
As a physical therapist, she realizes the limits of her arms

and legs, but the doctors inform her that she has lost
too much and her fractures will never fuse. *I've started*

running again. Over the line, her voice holds whole and smooth.
Sound needs a body to travel through.

Between distant cell towers, another wave approaches.

II

Nocturne

In night's throat
 I teach myself

to cut the light, to sleep
 open, to stuff hollows

with stillness. Swallow:
 a small motion,

to allow to pass
 down. Not everything

will wake up this morning.
 I want this to mean

the darkness renders
 recognition,

but too soon the room
 quickens,

first the window growing
 like an orchard on the wall,

then corners seizing
 convergence.

Daylight enters,
 paining the iris

into constricting the eye.
 To accept into

or to envelop.
 To receive, as evening

does morning,
 without question.

Anatomy of Water

I'd become a stream. But the river-god knew me
even liquid, shed the man's form he'd assumed, turned
into his water-self.

—Arethusa 5.636-8 (Ovid, t. by Jane Alison)

The water arrives late / taking time to thread the plaster / fault line. In this one room / I
hear rodents / though now there must be only water's coalescence / under the eaves. It's not
the sky / that's falling. Vapors fattened / early this afternoon. They followed his pride / in
the wetness in me. He is the condition / of water's ascension and the consequence of Gods
and gravity / but his weight / allows him to follow me to my bed, where water lies to me.
My bed is a rhythm that lies. In the room's warped wood and cracked ceramic dress, I can
contain / in a plastic tub a portion of him. I run water / in the bath to force the surface to
change. The domestic / bodies of centipedes rise from the drain / buoyant, spindled, limp /
and drift past my knees / like handfuls of hair. When the Cincinnati rain drips into my bed, I
know I'll never forgive / these modes of waking or the cause / of my living here. These
months, the damp ground / is all that will carry me, but I have hope for others / and a crack
of earth to slip a tired body / out of itself and away / from all this water and love that we are
known for.

Insomniac's Needlework

I place the trinkets
of exhaustion

in my vanity
but out jumps

a bony music.
Across

from the bed
the mirror

waits obsessively.
My hair plays

its silver
strings. The spinning wheel

accepts the wool
after the dye has run out

so long as it is fed
the time. I have buried

the false answers
with the real

and refuse to learn more names.
I will follow

the light as it crawls
behind earth's shoulder.

From lamplight
I baste a mimic

to the wall.
The shape strains

in night's failing
skin. Across

an unstrung violin

my bow

draws out thin
syllables. I mend them

with a needle pulling
through the eye

each sound in a fit
of desire to pin it.

After Calling the Sea *Wine-Dark*

The theory goes that without the word
for blue, the sea

foamed with grapes.
Or the Greeks consumed

blue wine.
Or there was no sea

just a bowl of rising red
dust. Let me

put it another way:
in the sky, a rose burned

and our need was made
needless.

Yet here in the middle
of things

a claw-footed feeling
grapples for a name.

It shifts through several hues,
a burrowed eel

inspecting the muck
for crayfish and snails.

That I could leave it
just so

and with it this growing worry
that in language

it will learn
to live, that I could leave

it like the sea at night—
wine-dark,

unspeakable.

Anatomy of Her Language

You hide your mind in a red bone.
You are the daughter that murders her father's gifts.
You are the daughter that spits and you are red for it.
On your father's altar, you lay out the letters.
You line them up like lovers.
You line them up according to use.
You arrange their bodies in the shape of an ear.
This language has taken up a sword.
This language has drawn blood.
I want to hear you, but the drumbeat fades
and the flag of mars advances on the field.
By spring, the poppies will invade our boot prints.
When they say our language went to war,
they mean you couldn't speak it to its end.

Ballad of the Fiddle Tree

As always, as if for the first time, the ground rises
to meet yellow poplar seeds. Here, the violin's carved veins
lie scattered in the dirt. An instrument parsed and set aside.
From what's left, mid-rib and blade, the violin replays
the absent minded violence of a human hand. Sediment
over a bridge of metacarpal bones. A low wind pulls
the granules back into soil. Between strips of leaf and stem
nestle a sprig of tinfoil, a tiny toy soldier, a parade
of bottle caps bartering for decomposition. To *cede*:
to give way, the hand removed from the instrument's
neck and returned to rest at the body's side.

What did I come here for, if not another song
to designate the closing of the year? A diamond
imprint on an old tree trunk? A four-lobed leaf
I've taken to pieces? I can't shake this vision
filtered through the lyric's eye.

In the ballad of The Two Sisters, the dead
body becomes an instrument and the instrument sings
the story of its death. To yield the possessed space,
where music intercedes, a rustle of cones. To give place.
Or *seed*—that which is or may be sown. The germination
of neural pathways, synapse, cast into the woods. Every fallen
seed cone a vibrating string. Every impression in mud or air
refilled before it has emptied, so there is

the only song following
the only death that rises
from the only body.

Echeneis or Six Ways of Letting Go

Eche'neis: the Remora, or Sucking-fish, which has on the crown of its head an oblong flat disk, or sucker, by means of which it can adhere to foreign bodies.

from Greek: (to hold + ship)

I.

He asks if I'm a good swimmer.
I know enough to keep my head
above water. In the dark, movement matters
more than form. He swims under
and I disperse the surface.
When we meet the sailboat (him
ahead) I reach for a railing
until my joints drop loose
and down. How simply the lake
welcomes me, until I can't tell the difference
between failure and return.

The boat rotates on her tether.
Blood flows gently as orchids from my arms,
and I am dark with the asking:
how long can we carry
our own bodies,
this heavy, private weight.

II.

Slick with the imagining of
a body that knows how to keep.

Little slack jawed remora
hidden in the eddies,
looking for something to adhere to
in the slippage of seaweed.

A ship swallows
itself at the horizon.

III.

to hold, to hold the ship
delay, darling, delay. I'm consuming time
and you, always pushing onward, so swift
and intent, and me, a hand always drawing you
back. The ship never meant
to not know time or movement, so immersed
that they drip from her sides, yet here kept apart
by the latch of a slat mouth.

I have no arms to throw against your hull,
but find me at the rudder sucking marrow.

Blame me not for your defeat, Antony.
Caligula passed only with my attention
on that long journey. Leave me in the brine
to lash against sediment. Half-hearted cartilage,
we're young. Before you cross on
to the shore, delay. The dry voice of sand
grinding down to its final cause. Clamp
and hold. Now only yielding eddies. Only favored winds.

IV.

I let go. You go on.

I let go. You go on in a green boat.

I let go. You go on in a green boat toward a green shore.

I let go. You go on in a green boat toward a green shore and when you turned

I let go. You go on in a green boat toward a green shore and when you turned
it was to make sure you'd left none of the parts

I let go. You go on in a green boat toward a green shore and when you turned it was to
make sure you'd left none of the parts of yourself, not even an outline of what

I let go. You go on in a green boat toward a green shore and when you turned it was to
make sure you'd left none of the parts of yourself, not even an outline of what hovers over
the glass waves, the watery threshold holding, holding, held, a hand

I let go.

V.

The remora is lazy,
unbelonging
to the motion in which it takes part,
unspooling from its mouth
a secret chain
to wrap around the beloved.

To unfasten, it must catch the motion,
surpass the object.

Ghost flesh carved
from scale, a glint
of bitten shadow.

To strengthen its grip, the remora
slides into the past.

VI.

In the sailboat cabin, we raid the kitchen,
filling our hands with paper towels,
hammers, handles, until we've run out
of objects. I set aside the bottle of kerosene.
We are looking for wine.
We are looking for a way to run out
of things to hold.

The boat empties
for us and still we search. We remove
the roof, the slats, the little hinged counter.
Platter and cup. Everything—touched.

I grow tired of acceptance
and the stars' fabricated gloss
through shallow waters. I accept this
as fact, that every reflection
adds a little weight. *You seem*
peaceful, he says,
as an ax floats up his tongue.

Invocation to Threshold

An act of seduction, this *vision of reality*
twinned by its mystery. This replication of image

without mutation. Without slip from the present.
Like ruins, certain words are raised from old meanings.

A ship will never be made from water.
This won't keep it from sailing on the roiled canvas.

You like the way the sea changes every ship that rides it.
I enjoy the ride. On our walks at the harbor,

we have the possibility of ship and of shipless.
We debate the name for where water touches land—

you offer *shore, skin, escape*, those unstable doors,
which is to say, one thing intrudes on another

in disguise, so that we believe a form can exist again,
or one thing arises as another, but can't escape its origins.

If you look out far enough, only water meets the waves.
We can say we'll meet here again tomorrow, so we say it.

III

[if not]

if not for the space
between atoms
you would worry less
about nothing. the difference
between the animal stepping into the light and you
is only a matter
of differing times of arrival. but you
pulled open the door too soon
and the future broke into her heart and you
lit a candle. her beast body remains
on the roadside. you drove on
because the space around her form
allowed you. if not for the space
between atoms
you would have died your one death
without knowing
to name it. nothing sleeps beside you
but it's not
for nothing you unfold
as though with enough use
these limbs might harden.
you question the need for error
like you question the hours kept
and the space between them.
if not for the space between atoms, you might
hear yourself honestly, but distortion
is a theory of light we formed
to fill a brief need

Ecdysis

She went first.
Her dress

spine-split.
She crawled out useless

palms and knees beaded
with alcohol, music

gleaming like fluid
down her back.

Everyone said
she had grown lustrous.

I waited for her to dry
hard enough

for me to take her
home.

I slept for weeks
in preparation.

When my turn came, suspended
in my enzyme-bed

dreaming giant
floating in a space

between bodies
carapace raised

I also knew how
to rupture. Strange

she hadn't given warning
of the barbed air

of the predators' circle
of time dripping

of that first body singing

its refusal

Barn Chores

I am order, though the morning causes
enough chaos to suggest a wild

stays with us. I arrive early
to open doors and turn on lights.

In rafters, the swallows dream
their young out of the nest

and below cats paddle in seas
of straw mice. I measure

molasses or grain into troughs,
fill buckets with water until the spill

throws off a careful plan.
Leading the horses to the yard, I see

how little strength there is to go around.
We loop rope around their throats

yet they survive. We hammer iron to hoof
to prevent the world from wearing down.

My resoled boots won't last
through summer. I sweep up broken

hatchlings every morning, translucent
beaks, just a hint of yellow,

like the crush of a dandelion
over a wrist's cross of veins,

and the featherless wings
stretched against the fall.

Pink and tender
death and brush of broom.

I draw windows, secure latches.
The sweetness overtakes at sunrise

as flies drink from my body

and I surrender apples into restless mouths.

Parallax with Roman Gods

I. Motion

Is any river clean given
how many bodies it has rushed against?
The current plucks
at the warmth strung
under our layers.

I admit I left gifts for his wife
even after he saw me kneeling
on her temple stairs
after he carried me past
the incriminating altar and through the red trees
where my father lay buried in predictions.
For happiness I sacrificed
a cut of my hair
the offer dripping from the branches.

I was just a little unclean
when he dressed me
in the bride's cloth
veil weighing
my spine until I crouched to the floor on hard fists
with the gold poking like two horns
from my crown.

Perhaps I am not surprised
when Juno accepts me into the grove
fastens the collar clasp
flicks the bell
with a god-like finger to accompany
her leaving.

At the olive tree's heel
I construct a plea out of pits
but she says they already belong to her.

II. Annual

Sometimes I close one eye.

The image jumps from right
to left, all but the slivered middle.

Under the tree, I do this for hours, to consider
how, at any given time, Argus has up to a hundred jumping pictures.

Some are chipped, covered by an eyelash. Milky with cataracts.

He can't help where they look, so that he's always examining the dirt underfoot
or inspecting the cracks in the wall at his back.

You can slow the light.

It just takes passing through the right state of matter
to no longer be the fastest traveler.

IV. Error

Now's not the time to turn to the roadside copse
branches stitched over the rumble strips
a truck bright as a flute's ribs
carving its way into the side of the night
herds of cattle grazing
sickish and gold.
We've leaned heavily on images this year.
It's easier to think of myself as a marble with a field in it
a contained glass slope
but sometimes the image looks inward
and routs me out.
The corn we drive past isn't edible, but it survives.

Elegy for Escaped Aerostat

No one brought her down; we just watched
helium seeping out her seams and thrilled

at her dragging tethers, wiping out electric lines
as they whipped along the roads and fields

of Maryland. Some people, left powerless,
trailed her along the coast until she disappeared

into the edge of the ravine. Draped over
trees—the first time we'd seen the sky

let itself down. What filled her
to lead her to that rocky place. Where

was she going, air-backed, freely broken,
at an unclaimed cost, yet military made.

Though no one brought her down, we
would have, because isn't every unmanned

body a threat, every unshot surface
skin in waiting, and isn't this why we love

to hunt something loose over our land.

In the Father's Garden of Apparatus

Science was false by being unpoetical. It assumed to explain a reptile or mollusk, and isolated it, which is hunting for life in graveyards.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

But even as a child she knew
the question: how not to pluck
from this garden of centrifuge,
microscope, beaker, pink gel,
syringe, latex-free gloves,
a quick bite for her keeping?

He pries the red test tube cap
from her clamp of baby teeth
and returns to feed his tiny worlds
with the image of her stomach
scratching at a fatal chemical.

Is isolation the scientist's tool
for keeping the body from knowledge?

She'll learn the names of poisons
to not leave with an empty mind.

Flute

In the dark, the olive tree
could be the plum
tree I knew
as a girl or the tail
of a peafowl dragging
dust through the yard.
My new limbs drag
salt-strung and sore.
I hear him close
and open
his body. Mother
used to wash me.
Now dust
riddles me, where
I've learned
men guard women
for other men
and greet
each other with knives
at their hips
and sing war songs
while thinning the blades.

IV

Blueprint with Winter

Here lies the frozen river and here
are houses we'll erect on the skin.

Yesterday, a boot and an imprint.
What placed its weight
has left, but you must remain,
because of the frozen body
that breathes inside you.

*

Beneath the transparent sheet
of your chest runs a blue story:
a child and a child

don't know that need
is a season to prepare for.
I tell the doctors

there are things in your body
not worth finding.
Down your arms travels

a self-administered
dark electric.

*

Months twisted into hoary hours.

 You took down the ladder that once took us
to the roof. We grew into the red house. The rope swing
 hangs above the gray lawn in knots.

*

If your body hadn't given
up on you that winter,
I would have.
Cool for the skin's distance

from blood, I taste your fever
with the back of my hand.
Farther from what runs in me,

this surface is made capable
of measurement.
A palm's heat confuses

and palm-to-palm we lived,
until you pierced your skin
and through that needle

the north wind blew in.
You closed your body
on how you were made.

*

In deep December,

fish swim restricted strata. Ice grows over them,

 a still white trellis. The marry and divorce

of it. It drips back into water.

*

We discovered snowfields so early,
though a vision of summer
oxidized our wet lungs.
We bought snow cones.
We let words dissolve
in the heat of our mouths.

Later, in the caverns of our anger,
we stitched words with tight tongues
and called each other every name we knew
for winter.

*

Too cold, we said. The world

was slowing.

Imagine the moment you decide to go
is already the moment you've gone.

Ice creaks inside the birdbath—

Invocation to Flame

Though the gods have been carried off / like slivers of ash / I still strike up my word / In
this prayer, the piece of coal / can't decide whether to burn / or be burned or / if tomorrow
the verb will matter / In this prayer, you are next to me / and we stare at the tree's bodies /
made to make smoke / In this prayer / I pray nothing else transforms / because if you see
smoke / something made it through / fire without breaking

In this prayer, it's okay / that
what heals / hardens the skin like slag / In this prayer, I don't ask you to touch me / but I
do ask you to string my name / from your teeth / In this prayer, you ask / a question. Isn't
it strange? / but then you fade into the dark / so this prayer is maybe like the others / In
this prayer,

the wind shifts direction / and I repeat myself / because repetition is as close / as
memory comes / to its cremation / In this prayer, though gunfire / In this prayer, though
whip lash / In this prayer, though red iron / my language won't cauterize / In this prayer,
there are ways other / than first nothing, then pain / to measure the body / and the woods
/ watch lightless / as a closed hand.

Insomnia and Echo

A girl reduced
to a thin wind
recalls
Narcissus's burning
petals
floating on water
like a regression
of blades.

What does Narcissus do at night?
Does his reflection not require
an all consuming sun?

If he puts away his mind at night,
I envy him.

I use a knife
in the kitchen.
Discrete parts
fall away—
every object divisible
by one
sharp thought.

I'm afraid to admit
I am afraid.

I am afraid.

Neighbors rumble
through the walls.
The boy stirs
in sleep toward his
darkness. Mine
looks back
and repeats me.

The Weatherman's Son

doesn't believe me
when I say the rain is coming.
I feel it like a thief
with a knife at my throat;
it is ready to fall.
Once he pushed storm clouds
above his cradle, chubby palms,
their furrowed flesh,
returning damp and open
to a body full of static.
Now he disregards the signs,
flipping through television channels,
while I open my mouth to the back
of his unwashed head.
The rain is coming,
but I must spit our dinner out
and rub spoiled dishes clean.
The weatherman's son has fallen
asleep. Outside, the storm looks surprised
at what it will do;
it is already gathering little twists
of nightfall and is braiding a strong rope.
It tells me not to make a sound.

Myth and Labor

Through lip and tooth,
this electric tine

opens the body.
Tongue rind,

spliced palate,
chords thrum

with black static.
I surrender faster

than I want to admit,
but remind myself

that all lightning
is an attempt

to keep two parts
equal. Think of the word

strike—the hand reaching
to a landscape of other.

Later, under running water
you ignore its blush,

the force of your effort
pulled to the surface

of your skin.
I've conned you

into full display.
You shed

your false images
for me, take up

only the smallest
bolt, so small

it should hardly count.

There are two

necessary conditions
for lightning:

potential of two opposites
and the obstruction

of their meeting.
My doubt

was the medium
through which you passed.

Again, I brace
this obsidian spine

and try to stem
the contraction of ash.

Postscript: Lock

Sour dark. The morning rushes—
 a ship late to meet the current.
 I listen to the shower running, you
will return with a keyhole in your palm
 and ask me to step through it.
 Instead, I'll press the hour into you
 until your body sharpens.
You can't ask for the key
 if morning has already come
 and I am making breakfast in the kitchen
 and your hand, no longer a hidden
mechanism, has turned back into a hand.

Coin Toss

The center of
your eye: *locus amoenus*

a shade of willing
green.

After breaching
the basin's edge

our hands come
back to us

cupping flooded
roads questions

wedged under the nails
little threats

clinging to our jacket
cuffs. Breathing

the railed memory
requires the body

keep its violence
the pleasant

made pleasant
for this keeping.

A periphery remains
only to whet

the vision. There's a rule
to keeping

a coin's two sides
from overflowing. That one

side always wait
for the other

to complete its turn.

V

In the Field of Swinging Debris

The shutters clatter.
A pocketknife rattles in the washing machine.
Spring hasn't yet broken through.
We attend a lecture on a planet
that orbits two stars. After,
you take me to the astronomy tower.
On a wobbly stool,
I look at the rings of Saturn,
named for the God who eats his sons
in fear they will defeat him.
In the circumference of my doubled eye,
the planet, surrounded by the black iris
of universe, blushes.
How much closer will you come?
The quiet left by the tower's retractable roof
solidifies. When I step away from the eyepiece,
a circular impression
around my right eye begins to fade.

The universe had to create itself—you say. I inhale a blend of old spice and dove. One of our watches ticks on a quarter second delay. Nothing was unstable, you say. Let me rephrase: nothing was stable.

On our kitchen table,
a plum nearing the end

of ripeness, stretched
around a near-sphere

of purple ice.
At the center, a seed

an echo of the fruit
from which fruit erupted.

It threw itself apart. You hand me a book.

What we see of light is not enough. Call that which we have no knowledge of “darkness.”

*What happened was nothing split in two—negative nothing, positive nothing—until, unstable, nothingness threw itself apart. Rain riddles the window. Your equations cross the whiteboard like bird feet in snow. How far did you go in the space between our minds? Did you enter the universe's reflection? Did you let the ancient waves scatter to pigment in your new blue eye? But what about the *very* beginning? Don't ask, you say. There was no time. You cannot imagine it. Blue as the lightless space between our planet and the one you return your eye to in the dark.*

*

We build a home in the field of swinging debris.

*

*Two gold cubes on a scale—
how do you make one weigh more than the other
without addition or subtraction?*

All night, the sky performs its old ceremony. You return in the mornings with rings around your eyes. At the horizon, the husband hesitates, then thumbs his new bride's hem. I pick at crumbs, place a plate of them before you, and soon they turn to toast, to over-easy, to a bowl of bright tangerines.

Imagine medusa floating in space

in static configuration. The repulsive

force between medusa and earth

would precisely balance attraction

and she would float where stone floats.

Two horizons, having never met, share a nearly identical heat.

On the nights you stay home with fever, I let myself reside in it. We sleep heavily and our bodies curl like smoke. I leave a glass of water by the bed. Fever is a trickster. We pay homage to our false cold. Our skin won't tighten enough.

Medusa sleeps and a strand of her hair opens

its mouth and licks my elbow. It is dreaming
that a three-headed dog chases its singular tail

and metal birds clatter from the sky.

Warm flows into cold. Pages grow beneath my dry fingerprints.

*

Men will be birds. Stars will have tails. *The sun has a solid and fixed body*, the birds conclude.

Broken orbits lead to broken things,
so we paused to watch the wreck,
two pieces of tinder in the blazing field.
Viewed closer, the sun loses shape,
becomes a vaporous lilac bloom,
becomes the hot face of nothing.

I measure coffee grounds and watch the water drip dark through the filter. The filter browns. Mis-measured water dribbles over the lip. *If you heat up a cube, the molecules in motion grow heavy with new energy and the scale tips to their favor.* Is this not a matter of justice? A sword pares myth from fact. Justice equals two cold cubes evenly weighted.

I set your coffee beside the piled papers and pull the fuller cup up.

*

We left that center
of stolen fire
as two cooling stones.

Your jaw circles,
loosing some grinded syllables of sleep.

I read the hands on my watch
and readjust the dial. 4:12 a.m.,

its face shines up like a coin
embossed with a familiar smile.

We seem impossible now
at the line where morning

peels back its flimsy curtains.
Private trajectories already laid

before us, we set out.
It has already started.
It has already started—this day

that conducts energy out our hearts
and pores. I hang like stone

in the sky. And you, in suspense, a combustible globe.
It will be

as though we've never met,
our points of arrival too distant

to share origin or finale.
For now, kept in our closed eyes,

we have the body we made
at the beginning.
And, since once there was no time,
we touch here without end.

Except by Violence

Breath scraped
over whetstone
through alloy tube.
Airstream splits
into sound. I
cover an opening
to alter the note
wavering in
the hollow.

Biography

Madeleine Wattenberg received her Masters of Arts from University of Cincinnati in 2015. Her work has recently appeared in *Hermeneutic Chaos*, *Tinderbox Poetry Journal*, *Mid-American Review*, *Muzzle Magazine*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Guernica*. During her time in the MFA program at George Mason University, she also served as assistant blog editor for *So to Speak: a feminist journal of language and art*.