

POEMS TO PEDRO

**SARAH HARWELL
BRUCE SMITH
EDGAR PAIEWONSKY-CONDE
JESSICA CUELLO
CECELIA CATURELLI
MADELEINE STRATFORD
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SUZANNE SHANE
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REGRET

...and there my berries were, sitting on the table
never moved, yet moved on, tiny gnats gnawing

--devils hidden in the green star hook and eye,
my berries milky, fuzzed up, and melting,

dying? melting, sweetness to rot,
gnats of the night of stars and I tiny as a berry

in a great field of berries heard all of us yawping
our yawps before the gnats spring forth

from what is buried within us, while the gnats
gnaw their way into my berries, finally bursting into

(in my carelessness I made all this happen)
their own hunger and moving on we all move on

as the eater eats into a sweetness of ceasing...

THE PAST COMES FOR A VISIT

Pretty little lights all flown in
from time long gone she's still
cranking the freezer crank
she's still ironing the ironed
sheets, the air thick
like blackstrap molasses

she's stuck in the Tennessee soil
blackberry brambles stick
her hard working ghost
but what lit her evenings
that which we jarred and carried
that which we prisoned then pardoned

she's living she's dead she's just a thought
those littlelights flit their way
to this lit up northern city
to wash themselves in syllables of light
the ablution of change
their change so silver

it flickers day and night
they light the few pockets
of our damp dark fear
where they fly a kindness follows
their radio frequencies transmit
a sly communication

this world appears
appears
disappears

NO CARESS GOES AS DEEP AS THE SOUL

Memoirs of Hadrian, Maruerite Yourcenar

The wind was an animal that day
and God was missing, God who had been
our companion for days, staring out at us
with his human eyes, made in our image,
and embellished with our gold flecked sadness
which on God looked quite handsome,
and meaningful. God was gone and
in its place it left leaves, some could say
they were the hands of God, or the hair
of God, but who were we to say, we were
only the walkers who kept walking
because we had found a road. The road
wound through the Valley and the leaves
talked to us, their talk green and dense.
I held your hand but your hand
kept disappearing. I tell you this,
although you already know it, as if
it were a new story with a new ending.

Where did we go? We saw houses
with no inhabitants and dogs who barked
at our sudden appearance and the strange
flowers of a vine, feathered and timid.
Instead of God there was a small grey cat
who liked the feel of a hand on its head
and two donkeys, a mother and her foal.
Everywhere-and-nowhere-God
was not in the leaves, the almost not,
not human eyes of donkeys. Our breathing
on the uphill climb of the road grew heavy,
and near the end, before we turned around,
it opened, this road, into a field--
the grasses arrested the sun,

imprisoned in leaves, the sun, downing,
profligate--all of this greater than God's
supposed sadness. I was glad God was gone.

We tried on our way back to ignore
what was happening. There was nothing
we could do. We followed the river
carving the valley, a thin, spitting babbler.
We didn't kneel, or bow our heads.
When our hands touched we felt
the donkey, her uneasy proportions.
The wind blew like an animal,
and in the wind's keening: donkey, grass,
the feathered flower we couldn't name.
Near home, or what we called home,
we turned to look where we had been.
You said something I couldn't quite hear,
the wind took it away. That's when I saw
a bird flying but not, in the sky, shadowed,
like a kite tightly held on to, being borne
but also held, and as I tried to make sense
of what I saw, you turned, and in your
impatient gesture, so familiar and testy,
I recognized God's sadness,
that which you had disguised as anger.

THREE FOR PEDRO CUPERMAN

1. *Who wants air?*

No one calls in a request late Monday night on the radio, Abiquiu, New Mexico, not even the amigos of the DJ, not even Maggie Strikes the Ree or Rattling Hail, not the crows nor the shadows of crows, not the rehabilitated wind, sober now after six months of binge and purge on high and low pressures and clouds in the shape of a blast pattern in Kabul, wind who lost a continent, three wives, and a truck with payments, and the dog chained to a statue of the Virgen de Guadalupe. Not the crows nor the shadows of crows, the severed limbs, the plastic buckets of holy dirt from Chimayo. No calls from Kant and Descartes. No one, not even personas from your pocket, someone from the District wearing a wig and a jacket with a secret compartment in which there are wrappers from Dulces Vero and folding chairs set up for the film of the genocide.

2. *he wants an X/on the left side of his dreams*

Where the read-out of the police data base has him in the system, where the hijack happens, where he runs 100 miles to the ocean to gather salt for his elders, where he reads the patterns in the horse blankets as musical notation for a sick guitar riff and jankiness he flexes to. The spirit he doesn't believe in enters through the talus of his left foot, right brain to enflame his angels. He leans over a red felt to pick up chips he's won at the casino: 100 million bits of something he can't name. X marks being here, not his extinction, listening to the only two stations that come through: traditional and new, the two dolors, one sticky, one slick. One tears off the skin like a bandage from a wound, one fades silently, a coyote, leaving not pain but remembering, worse because it's unnamed, in the left side of his dream. He wakes, vexed, as the mechanic in El Duende who has only metric wrenches to undo the American nuts and bolts and the engine's running in the Chevy.

3. *I enter the void, it has the shape of a viola*

The shape of the civil rights worker, Viola
Luizzo, who was killed by the Klan, March 25,
1965. The void has her shadow and the shapely
solids of justice. The void has the shape
of rubble, rubaiyat of Rumi, Hikmet, runes
of home and sun. The void has no bow
but rosin from pine stumps used by
bull riders and baseball players to hold on
to the velocity, the enormity. The void
has a music like J. Edgar Hoover howling.
Papers [for crossing, for writing,
for Xing the wedding] swirl in the eye
of a slow cyclone where it's terrible
and windless. On the papers
are a spell if pronounced con cuidado
can make the maker appear, but a kinder,
less violent one who gives out
milk and govt. cheese.

A PAINTER'S DEATH

—for Ronald Caro

for five days
he had not seen her
around the house
though it had rained
profusely
and so he dared
to dream again
of plastic drums
retentive rains
bi-cephalic flies
and retroactive butterflies
and so he sat
oblivious his eyes to the crack
winking above the stove
absolutely absorbed in the fact
that Minnie Mouse
has no genitals
when Death came back
white
servile
politely trite
entirely sterile
wearing a rose lake turtle shell neck-
lace
no longer eager
to tell
how well
she felt
breathing
air
between
his words
listening

***THE HUNTED WHALE ADDRESSES
THE STARVING MEN: CHAPTER 52***

Below the ship skeleton, the red rust
masts like beast skins

below that weary
below that despair
the dropping trumpet
and the hunted.
Below the tired ship, the scrap.
the make believe of trouble.

Below the chase you gave,
whoever died or starved
in your race, below

the helm, the sadness,
disappointment.

Below the trumpet, letters
addressed to Ocean

below was my oil rolling in me.
Oil, skin, bones.

I was the animal:
cause of your grief
and hunger.

 Cause, oil, silent body
 below the ship.

What you've done
to me you've done to you.

***THE GRAND ARMADA:
CHAPTER 87***

on the outer circle kill all you can
wing them, so they can be killed later at leisure

at the center was the warm breath
eyes that gazed away from the breast
rich milknot a fleet
skin still crumpled from the womb,
new and delicate

the umbilical cord swayed
between a mother and calf
like a coiled jump rope

the calf nosed the boat
born and gentle
as a dog

the crew didn't ask for this scene
when they wrote their names
in the ship's registry and earned
a lay of 1/350th, no wages

it lifted them to sweet fields,
to a home, stopped their minds,
they thought of milk—heavy, sweet

on the outer circle
the cutting-spade kept cutting,
the infant eyes were unaccusing

***THE CAPTAIN OF THE RACHEL BEGS AHAB FOR HELP:
CHAPTER 128***

Do to me as you would have me do to you

you too have a boy

you too see his face in the dark
before you sleep and cringe
for his safety—and whisper, beg
for the others, whoever they are,
to keep him

help him since he's broken from you always
once he walks
once the world
and once the sea

I scan for each dark spot.
He's 12. He's in a boat
adrift. Split the sea
with me and search. You must must
my arms a gate, my eyes, my ship,
my arms, my watch

son of my years
out there

your son is not my son my son
is not yours you are you
refuse you don't have a boy
a son there is a boy back home
with your name blood but you
don't belong to boys or sons,
you forsake them

POR PEDRO C.

I

atravesaste paisajes milenarios
abiertos como gargantas
de extraños animales
(aquellos que habitan en los sueños)

cruzaste el Ganges
y el río de la Plata
la Elba y el Ródano
quizá también
el Orinoco y lo arroyos lentos
de tu tierra

no te fue extraño el turquesa
ni el rubí
ni la nieve sobre las montañas
rojas
y tu hermano era el negro salado
del océano

y sin embargo podías perderte
en la emboscada de las palabras
en aquel entonces cuando ser era creer
y las horas largas como serpentinas
de humo y café
entretejían una alfombra invisible

espuma o sombra

II

llegar de forastero a una isla
quedarse allí algunos días

desde lo alto divisar las costas africanas

Ile du Gorée , Voile D´ Or-Dakar

olvidarte perdido en el ardiente Agosto
de una sonrisa y de una ofensa

saber que la ternura
tampoco el beso
pueden detener
la piel que se marchita

III

y aún así abrirse al viento
como ala de velero
abrir los brazos las costillas el corazón
la boca las córneas de los ojos
los dientes la lengua los pulmones
abrirse y desmenuzarse
como arena del desierto
como polvo de cenizas del sacrificio

cuando Abraham no degolló
al hijo
sino a un ternero blanco
casi tan blanco
como un lirio

KNOWING

there is meaning
fullness
in my yearning
for the knowledge
of you

your vowels
like a touch
stroke my ears
from the distance
while consonants
tickle my thoughts

you and I
recall new referents
making us
we

how can I
already
feel
such fluency
in you
when I both
know and do not know
how to make you
out

WORDS

behold the words
growing between
us
worth holding on to
like hands
ours
reaching
 out
beyond language

untwist my tongue
that I can speak
out
this urge to
touch
the words we share
like
play
fully inquisitive
smiles

LAMENT 2

I went to the place of the poem but it was small
and dark and smelled like the ancient dens of foxes
Time kept coming back to scratch at the door
Old words littered the walls as if to keep the damp out
Someone had lit a fire but the ashes were cold
and the spiders were everywhere
And there was such sadness in the spaces between words
so much nothingness in the everything they said
Why fear the nothingness but we do
How fear the meaninglessness which we are
Here is my voice hang it on a tree
Here is my shoe which remembers me
And beautiful were your black diamonds
like the beauty of the sea at night
the points and spires and breezes of the night
where you passed and I followed and the words went out
and I vanished

LAMENT 4

How shall I say goodbye to myself poor
Charles Bon in his New Orleans and his emptiness
his decadence and charm and poisonous knowledge
who yet found you beyond all luckiness or fate
Goodbye to the heart hurt by its own betrayals
the mind full of inconsequence and error
a voice too full of itself
knickknacks and charms and the color blue
the silent cries of trees and the lake's sheen
and the numberless leaves haunting the numbered days
The man of the hour is the skeleton in the sombrero
who lies down in the curves of the voluptuous senorita
to a clatter of bedpans in the wings and the cackling of the damned
I sang you the songs of your fiery bones
and the soft opening flower of a dying kiss
Farewell to the grief of days and the holy smell of roses
your face knees voice like water
thighs like snow and eyes full of sky
Your laugh startled me so so long ago
My will such as it is I give to clouds and to dreaming
my bones to the cathedrals of sand
to the pottery shards of lost places
my eyes to the vulture who resembles me
my wishes to wind and my loneliness
to thousand year old trees and the deserts of desire
I loved you in the simplest of ways my girl
and this is my poem which has no ending

LAMENT 5

I can imagine the loneliness of widows unraveling
unwelcoming days and old men in shut rooms
measuring their meds losing their minds dates names
If only vanishing were easy an old movie maybe
the corny deathbed speech the melodrama
each bedside mourner a cameo and case study
You see it in the eyes the soul speaking eye
to eye for the last time drinking the last horizon
And the faces strange and the rooms we wake in
with a start the floor moving and the windows dark
are no more ours than the clouds are or the voices of children
Is it the book misplaced that makes me weep
or tortured animals slaughtered children rape
by bayonet or any gone world's going
My grandmother kept a book 85 years pressing
a four-leaf clover given by a friend when they were five
Isn't that worth more than walking on the moon
but nothing stays still straight or in place
but the mute dignity of bones
bones without memory bones without song
So let us go under the hill and over the sky
and let us be bones together

LAST DISPATCH OF THE GHOST OF MY FATHER

- In memory of Pedro, who knew well the traps of the heart and the liberating power of dance, poetry, and humor.

That tower
Erected in your absence
In whose gray gloom I prayed,
Aspired to love, fell short
Still stands—though now I view it from the garden.

The walls leaked cold, a circling chill
Your milkskinned widow rose to challenge.
I understood, dressed lightly,
Defied concerns of climate,
Recalling tales of saints and martyrs
Whose every sacrifice might expedite
Their passage into heaven.

I liked the taste of tears
And cried for Mother too
Who hung your image over cracks and flaws
And urged us to adore you.

Mostly I read books all day,
Or enjoyed the birds who visited
My window feeder.
I loved the bluejay best
And imagined him a prince
Watching, guarded,
From the great oak overrun with squirrels.

Nights were long,
Especially in summer.
Mother paced above me
Fingering her rosary,
Worrying how tenuously

Her vested power stretched.
Sister occupied the western wing,
Concocting trips. Her brain steamed.
I sometimes smelled it burning.
Of all of us, she could
Conjure you the best.

Your only son called Mother's martyrdom
A fraud, my reading bunk. He claimed
The dungeon, built bombs, threatened
Holidays with thunder. Mother's pacing
Turned erratic then. Her prayers and curses
Dropped like flares, warning us
To lock our doors. Some nights though, he took himself too seriously.
The ambulance would arrive like a flashy
Messenger, and he too would submit.

But nights were typically more quiet.
I taught myself to dance, reflected in the murky glaze
Of my two windows. I didn't care
If you could see me. I suspected you'd be pleased
More than with Mother, who displayed
Your polished artifacts in rooms
She preferred we didn't enter. And sometimes
It did look like you watching—same straight nose,
Same full cheeks and lips.

Now the tower's less damp.
(She spent a fortune dehumidifying.)
Fewer portraits hang in public view.

Your son brings huge bouquets

On Mother's Day. Postcards
Come from sister. I wave
From the garden's edge.
The tower still stands
That stood most still
The day I circled down
Its narrow winding stair
Drunk on slatted sun
And wanting more. I stood
In sun's full blinding gaze and danced.
Danced and dared sky rain on me.
I danced, undressed to lapping heat,
The unhinged world, and forgave us all.

VISIT TO A RANDOM ORCHARD

This place is as good as any.
The pageantry of stars gets old,
but the vastness-closeness-farawayness never ends.
Apple trees crouch like giant, sci-fi spiders.
White flowers blow away toward the granary.
I carry the disappointment
of the old house key, the father-comb,
the wedding ring with no diamonds.
I feign a prayer I can't remember the words to.
In the distance, I see the lake at sunset
flash like a knife.
I open the shoebox
and let all my mother's photographs
scatter across the orchard.
Some of the photographs
are black and white and some
are in the washed-out colors of the past.
Some of the faces I know
and some are strangers.
Some of the faces I know are strangers, too.

ORANGE SUNSHINE

We are not dancing.
We are standing near the kitchen sink,
pouring water from a vase,
watching the blossoms' burnt pink petals
swirl down the drain
like the delicate folds of skin
over the eyes of wild horses,
and I'm reminded of a lifetime ago,
looking at my face in the mirror,
stunned there, as my temple's snake vein
pulsed and bloomed, stupid as a blue rose.

NORTH ISLAND

—For Bei Dao

You could be from anywhere
but never go home.

For you, all cities were ruins;
every room four corners
of foreign, the bed's white sheet
a blank passport to bad dreams.

I wished you were a bird,
so you could fly over
the globe's perfect grid
and land on a strong branch.

The world is very small now.
I don't need to give you the wings
I made for you from burning leaves.

I'm not saying good-bye.
I'm writing to ask, where are you,
now that home is the head of a pin?