Port Cities

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PORT CITIES

by

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B.S., College of Charleston, 2009

A thesis submitted to the
Faculty of the Graduate School of the
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of the requirement for the degree of
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This thesis entitled:
Port Cities
written by Caroline Joanna Davidson
has been approved for the Department of English

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Ruth Ellen Kocher

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Noah Eli Gordon

Date__April 25, 2013____

The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.
A speaker experiencing physical isolation, interpersonal disconnection, and gaps in knowledge of familial history/ancestry, attempts to piece together and rationalize discrete sequences in multiple figures lives, thinly veiled by operatic structure. The speaker desires to sustain briefly-experienced moments of physical, intellectual, and emotional connection, despite the awareness of this being unfeasible. Familial history, diaspora/emigration, itinerancy, and physical/emotional intimacy are questioned through the speaker’s longing for reason in the unknown; in particular, the cultures and practices independent of the speaker’s subject position, such as Italian operatic performance and Catholic rituals. Structures meant to stabilize and connect—musical/operatic sequence, architectural foundations, port cities/harbors, marriage and romantic relationship practices—are troubled through sequential breaks, fragmented memories, and unexpected turns. The poems attempt to connect disparate elements that range from historical musical practices of Romanian and Ukrainian Jewish immigrants to Italian Eighteenth-Century opera, European port cities to assimilated Midwestern suburbs, and intimate relationships to the World War II propaganda statement: “The Dawning of the Century of the Common Man.” These subjects—the trade ports, operas, family members, intimate partners—become falsified constructs through the speaker’s explorations. The subjects resonate merely as concepts, idealized structures that ultimately cannot be reached through language. Reason fails to account for irrational elements beyond understanding. What can be realized and sustained, however, is longing itself; the longing and continuous pursuit for the beauty and resolutions that art and intertextuality might provide; the desire for language, music, and interpersonal relationships to reach an ideal place beyond fragmented reality, regardless of this impossibility.
Contents

Sacrodramma........................................................................................................................................1
Out of Sequence....................................................................................................................................2
Out of Sequence....................................................................................................................................3
Out of Sequence....................................................................................................................................4
Out of Sequence....................................................................................................................................5
"Our Need for Consolation is Insatiable" ..............................................................................................6
Sustain Pedal ........................................................................................................................................8
Far Water ..............................................................................................................................................9
Arioso ..................................................................................................................................................11
Three Broken Parts.................................................................................................................................12
Aria After Copland’s “Quiet City,” and “Fanfare for the Common Man” ............................................13
Sempre Costante (Aria dal Segno).........................................................................................................14
Sempre Costante ..................................................................................................................................15
Sempre Costante ..................................................................................................................................16
Sempre Costante ..................................................................................................................................17
After our Serenade Ends in a Less-Than-Calm Resolve .................................................................18
Displaced.............................................................................................................................................20
Disorient (Adriatic Coast) ....................................................................................................................21
Lit Robes in Ancona’s Duomo Crypt (Adriatic Coast) ........................................................................22
More Fanfares for the Common Man .................................................................................................23
Lost....................................................................................................................................................24
Expel the Wayfarers..............................................................................................................................25
Building Sway.....................................................................................................................................26
You’re Not in Mom’s Address Stack....................................................................................................27
“It’s Amazing we are Here at All” .........................................................................................................28
Rumania, Rumania, Ohio, Ohio ...........................................................................................................29
The Political Perspective of a Squirrel: An Ohio Exit Aria................................................................30
Gnaw the Skin, See the Bloodlines ....................................................................................................32
The Meaning of Clean............................................................................................................................33
Hack Would be One Hundred This Year.............................................................................................35
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Of Export</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dying Homeland, Still Dying, What About Yours?</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dramatic Cavatina</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dream Gondola</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fluctuations of Certainty</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always Your Audience</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“The Demon” by Rubinstein</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always a Sailor Dressed as a Suitor in Opera Buffa</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Narrate Detachment</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Water Strings (Questions of Settling Down)</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Polite in the Pulpit</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dislocation</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who Am I Talking To Why Can’t I Get Out of Here</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Begins with a Father's Memory</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Origins</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twice-Removed</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Want to be Located Somewhere Significant I Want to be Found</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foundation Slanted, Ninety Degrees</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Left Alone, a List of Wants</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Sequence</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Out of Sequence (L.A. Morning)</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several Contending Passions of the Agents Brought into Conflict</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As I Sit Here Misreading Everything I Wrote for the Past Two Years.</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Mishearing/Misreading</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Too Soon Aria</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Una Corda</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understudied</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One Woman Production of Mozart's <em>Cosi Fan Tutte</em></td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dying is Too Easy, Family: Where did the Songs Come From?</td>
<td>76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Questions of Current Atmosphere</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>79</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SACRODRAMMA

What prepares for the presence in the unstated half, the line, contralto screams.

Entr’acte, aware of place constellated into memory, bits you end up longing after
**Out of Sequence**

Once an opera singer said he would make me pregnant and we would raise our children in the spirit of music and poetry. He had a tattoo of the Virgin Mary because he “loved her colors.” I let him inside me then fled his country.

*Neither was the 20th Century kind to this old city; badly bombed in the 2nd World War, it was again brought to its knees by a major earthquake in 1972.*

I am interested in sequence because I can’t seem to grasp it.
Out of Sequence

- Points left out of a father’s life plot. He is a jumble of Danube mist and Enlightenment principles and silence. Today I should map this sequence. Instead I glance at an Adriatic port city’s timeline:

- Built on two hills that form an amphitheater around the harbor, it was settled in the 4th Century BC by Greek colonists from Syracuse.

- Another man resurfaces today. He tells me he is shooting a movie. LA works sometimes. I used to think about him while being fucked next to a poster of a stripper with devil horns. The man shooting a movie has a late call time tonight and an 18-year-old costargirlfriend who just bought a house in Santa Monica.
Out of Sequence

- J is in Boston right now dripping rust. Maybe I will send her a lacquer dish and include some notes on the process of making lacquerware. The curing process. Dissolving polymers. Precise sequence. I could also mention that I imagine her body every time I see photos of ancient Italian ruins.

- Without inscriptions do monuments destabilize? The Romans exploited its sheltered anchorage. Shipbuilders erected J’s apartment. Her hull leaned to the left. She wore a stained white frock that once hung on a dirty rack.

- In 115 AD, under the Emperor Trajan, the present harbor walls were raised.
Out of Sequence

Achievements are uncomfortable. Something has to topple and someone gets sacrificed and someone continues sweating at sea level. Memory offends achievement.

The stately ceremonial marble arch standing forlornly at the end of the docks marks his achievement.

Disrupting patterns widens perception. Cinema is always less boring than real life, says Common Man. J rolls her cigarette in Adriatic sand. The father remains silent.

...rows of blind arches and plenty of fidgety carving. Inside, a glass panel in the pavement allows you to see the remains of the even older church below.
“Our Need for Consolation is Insatiable”

Too accustomed to sublimity and birthing ice, so I blow some epoxy film into a man’s neck, glitz slurped from the backs of my gums. It’s too early for this Hell talk. There’s a jetpack in his closet that I want to dismantle and glue to certain stomach folds while I hunch under his mattress. All existing, raise three fingers. This is not a concept of disconnect, but his touched scruff stands on end for it.

We practice our own versions of monogamy in our own torso figuras cast by the curliest head. Am I adequate enough to be recalled in action paints daubed by your fist.

You know why I can’t sleep over. The dream left my knee-backs pouring. Someone left to dredge my nearest reservoir. And now the sun almost reaches the Hudson, muzzles unholy the rising Sunday slur of the city. A consolation. I’m cervical and mistaking blood spatter for lamb sandwich spills. Midtown pinches, rewards my limp and lack of Christ-based facial shape. I can’t stay. I’ll injure every aria.
[Most commonly used:

*rightmost on modern piano, raises dampers off strings so that they can continue to vibrate sympathetically and sound after a note on the keyboard has been released. Allows pianist to sustain notes otherwise out of reach—*

*continuo costante*

*sempiterno*

*sempre*

*constants consolation*
Sustain Pedal

Ballads hammered inflexible,
 attempts to sustain,
 connect low-lying
 water to your cigarette
 falling off the balcony.
 Separations
 when we wake up:
 inevitable,
 faulted. We are
 not our family. Aching
 flanks, the sexual run is
 stalled and creates
 this unnamable
 brute whose anger
 rises in pinned slips.
 I could study harbor
 histories, could keep this all
 surface, could memorize origins
 and flecks coming
 off your toenail, genetic
 machinations, bells clamped
 together in another
 high-rise, your low-lying
 cock, architectural
 stabilization, never fucked
 enough, time then to look
 at more pediments,
 transported monasteries,
 as they shatter and
 clamor together,
 become a more precise
 voice disguised in the cool
 aperture of brass pedals, settling
 all strains, all
 dampening.
Far Water

I get fatter listening to this opera.

There are so many high notes to swallow,

and then I also swallow the relic stone of the angel’s mouth—

rubbed by weather into a surgical mask.

The mask itches on the way down.

Give me the foot of the night heron.

I’ll swallow that, too.

During the arioso the man beside me speaks.

It is as if he says, “Do not get used to seeing” he says “me near this” he says “marina.”

Some need for the circuitous.

As if I reply, “When you smoke your veins exhaust blue like the virgin’s mantle.

When you smoke you exhale on the city’s syringe

where I take my best baths.

Where I am ocean-heavy with beaks.”

The night heron screams from the severing,

bites the aria in half—bites the passage—

the melodic, formal organs,

pipes and amber in the ripples—reverberations—

I need to mask it all mask all of the water

signs, the gulping stones

who choke on silt and too much force,
who rinse the tones of the boat bells I wake to.

No. There are no boats.

This is a passage

within a notation

within these furnace bed sheets and,

smeared on the marble floor,

an Argonaut song.
Arioso

San Giacomo, do you enjoy baritone sex or ship keels?

What almost-logical progression—

fucked in floral stretch-dress, words to run down scales—

which relic do you prefer—a Mediterranean hair?

*Beat me, beat me,*

*fair Masetto.*

Falsetto trembles on body prongs,
road-eaten, road-certain, my cringe

now lit for good on a pedestal of names.

Sottomesso

The Italian word for “Claws” translates roughly to “Pliers” in English. The opera singer quoted Eliot: “I should have been a pair of ragged claws.” I read it as “a pair of rusty pliers.” I thought I had done something gravely wrong.
Three Broken Parts

Buffa, Opera Seria, and a handful of dryads gutting themselves near harbors. The I wants controlled familial sequences gilded opera houses tight-closed arias to stop losing people in port cities\(^1\) to stop losing port cities.\(^2\) If there is no harmony there should be a few pillars mathematical principles regulated beats on which to balance.

\(^1\) People including, but not limited to: J, Red, Randall, Common Man

\(^2\) Port cities including, but not limited to: Lvov, Poland Galatz, Romania Odessa, Ukraine NY, NY Ancona, Italy
Aria After Copland’s “Quiet City,” and “Fanfare for the Common Man”

“The common man is the common hero.
The common hero is the hero.”
-Wallace Stevens

Dueling with mandolins for your finger in me, dry bank dry sage we are not in a city this is a suspension bridge and this, a raised garden bed and never ours, but cracked banks come back to leave again why did I let you leave that early without taking a lemon or two, and under this cranked sepulcher, I wind around a rubber water-catcher, become a succulent you may tear after too much Bourbon, let me build this fanfare for you, common man, common man in bed, you don’t make me tired enough there, just everywhere else.

Common man will you temper and butterfly-slice me with a serrated blade and how old is that Grand Organ? Exposed pipes, minimal exponents. There are more spills where that came from I assure you. Begin with an ascending triad. Style based on repetition, lying glass voice, embarrassed facing a crushed wall. Keep a strict schedule, common man.

Flutes cough in respective corners. I learn during the entr’acte: trash doesn’t entirely disappear.
**Sempre Costante (Aria dal Segno)**

I.  
Four Four Time  
Regulated presence  
Chugging tea with mother  
Pretending we are elsewhere  

Only Women  
_Bella Figuras_  
Delicate Breadcrumbs  

Not the  
_Year Of_  
_Reasonable_  
_Men_  

Mother’s sound desires:  
An English Tump and tea  
A hearty Mennonite meal  
Verified aria sources, no,  
that is my reasonable wish  

True constants: old composers’ forgeries  

Enjoy the tricks of age  
Mother’s religious leanings  
She wants to be stabbed by psalms  
For me to stab her with psalms
Sempre Costante

II.

I could enjoy that forgery if I were not distracted by the Amish girl behind Yutzy’s Market counter as she reads sadomasochist fiction—now I fear I have been found out—Basso Continuo—new undercurrent, new reasonable constant and my previous success at being whipped by reasonable men as gratitude for allowing me to translate pain is a new time kept.
Sempre Costante

III.

Mother asks the girl for half a pound of Farmer’s Cheese. My nipples ache in their just-right bruising. I understand shunning as I don’t have much stamina for beauty. I learn so late of ancestors from Lvov. Another port city, harsh currents repeated, then fleeing, familial floods, unreasoned but always constant, Sempre. Sempre.
Sempre Costante

IV.

These arias dal segno,
repetition from the sign,
more harbors, Galati,
Odessa, but an aria is a closed
system, a bruise, not a passage,
passing, a man passing through harbors
fraught with dead currents, stale
continuous orthodoxy pressing
strong on the kettle on your bled-
through mattress and I come
I come to no consciousness
but still say thank you but still
unable to claw my way into your
stomach so the constant becomes the
repeated act of scraping dry
bread on my neck to consummate
my beginnings with
our riddled
distance
After our Serenade Ends in a Less-Than-Calm Resolve

Unable to remember the next note the previous

Crack willow, severe allergen
springing right near. Right

parted fingers swell, angle
toward constant triads

Un-crumpled mirror paper; reliance
session in itself.

Age in monochrome. Yell. Yellowing.

Touch myself in front of the window screen
vacuumed out.

Dead white note
Dead white film I don’t want to
watch so bring another minor

third chip every key waste

my lips on wax-
cast harmonies. Fading wick,

reeds, diminuendos still
cleaner than fan blades

cleaner than who
may walk close to this sill.
DISPERSE, DEBASE
Displaced

Galatz, Romania, recent floods,

today a father cuts off—

when the amount of gravesites outnumbers
the population,

valleys swell, talismans for both of us,

scaffolds we lose, communities ebbed,

“A community of originals is not a community”

callous men-filled cities.

I scour my groin with brick
and lime—

its waste is a withdrawn
character fiddling with fishing

wire, boat scraps.
Disorient (Adriatic Coast)

Landed here with
carlins running
captured in bled nets

Wrong ferry

Monteluco?
Montefalco?

Is that a fresco
of a virgin
or a virgin?

Every town a town of “people passing through”

Hear the ferries leave
vulgar bells

Charge Charge

Chords grow
drunk with

themselves poppies

grow drunk
with themselves

I forget the meaning of clean.
Lit Robes in Ancona’s Duomo Crypt (Adriatic Coast)

Bronze encases
   chewed knuckles
   marked by death robes

paint sacks—
   cans of thinner
   smoke makes marble
thinner us thinner at

   Saint Cyriaci’s tomb, little Red next to me, she
knows how to pray
   proper to preserved
   coats
I am no more sacred than façade cats

   my chest a bleached egg
framed in glass precise

   this candle
   for someone else
More Fanfares for the Common Man

I doubt my dancing on
any stone. I drop a feather for half heroes,
  pedestals, this Man:
  The diminished fifth
  where trills end.
No flattering.
Fifty-Five Sinclair Road.
  Speech latched
bread truck doors. Crawl on.
  fortified figuras.
Parades to make death tolerable. His day.
Diminished who,
devil’s chord, I am pursed
  along the sidewalk, accused of
releasing him too easily, but there is no
  release so there can be
  no music
  no pure flood.
Lost

I become ignorant
man again
after smog cleans.

I lose another pal body.
Cheers, low-functioning anythings.

*The major abstraction is the idea of man*

American romantic project America collective sacred opera the giant bedframe-fecund principle safe haven.

*And major man is its exponent, abler*

_In the abstract than in his singular (Stevens)_

You break my spirit so often I build nothing from its gutters.
Expel the Wayfarers

Two four time signatures, losing more frets.

Troubled vessels of song trouble waking up on Sundays. One treble one synagogue left.

Abandoned at water, cedar clarinet.

Abandoned at dock, spatula, handicrafts.

I want to return to factories, find scales looted for feast and glissando,

but there is no opera in Galati no metal knobs reverberating lost counter-voices
Building Sway

Given good advice
from the narrow
terror of building a scraper,

but some corn-fed sky
lit me out early.

Suddenly I am more West.

Earlier the piazza quaked in half.
I heard you fell through,

held tenses
in your mouth.

Humiliation by hand.

Dampers depressed.

A centerpiece toppling.
A card tower.

More than one kind of decline.

I don’t know what to build.
You’re Not in Mom’s Address Stack

Rolodex drops against the map.

Two names, laminate,

nametag,

let’s play

Maptag.

There’s the Black Sea, and there,
The Carpathians. Anyone can write
capes and harbors, lungs,

family-tragic. Hardship breeds

harder ship sides when the precedent

is not set when the streaks on office

windows are from rain or thrown

rolodexes.

Lacquer address box.

Quartz clock.

Poem inherited, “then has to go to
gen some work done,”

reinforce the architecture.

I’m so sorry my games are not fun,

that I can’t stop the Black Sea’s

reflex of turning away
“It’s Amazing we are Here at All”

Trouble waking Sundays. Wind
clutches blood-maws,
straps a melody to frowns:
*itinerant merchant,*

*itinerant sob singer,* no formal
Klezmer measures keep the
father harbored. He settles inland,
no ports, no *debased city,* but
O is there to begin memory, Odessa,
not *Ades.* To own fences not gates.

To own. The corn is not doing well, soy
stirs. What is allowed here swells:
distance. Descent. Wells of burned ancestry
shadows Romanian dockyards, it’s “Amazing we are
here at all,” while the Barry sisters
glorify *Rumania, Rumania,* the one good

stint drinking in the ghetto, gypsy
rhythms trouble the halls,
he soups
his limbs along to sleep.
Rumania, Rumania, Ohio, Ohio


Cataclysmic politeness. Starve in bulk.

-Bless this absurd laugh, another person impossible to connect with, *domina*, threat level, my cost on new society, fit for musical effect, edges moored tight.

-Happy to be compromised in a Northwest corner. The father keeps mechanic, bricks out taillights. I bed-fold a new emergency, I drive him to the diner, and never flatter the vanities of the ruling classes. At times he is the only man fascinated by neurotransmitters.

-Midwest refuge, no design, on its own. One blue stone on the bland candle display. But Williams says stones invent nothing, only a man invents. Some quieter need. He launders a crumpled sash downstairs. Spin cycle. I am accepting time will not elongate enough to coil back.
I will scratch out steel mills,
    lick the raw buckeyes
    whose leaves spring dust
behind the trash compactor.

What urgency
    behind nationalistic
butter knives, insistence of
    place, look I found his fifty-year-old
*Paterson* notes: “Need for self-renewal—boredom=death”

What shipments
    are in I can’t do this any
more, be “Girl as harbor” and you
“As city”
    “As scaffold,” chipping no stop
leaving, but be
    *high-art-simple* about it—

create an Arcadian street scene—
    character study in flattening
    out. Flat hotel eyes
in a stained Lucien Freud print,
    matted sheets flatter chest in the same
pensione.

Into the arch, a dirty
    gust. Says my father,

    we are not cutthroat enough to be
CEO’S, I
need a new ledger, gauze. To stop
missing how medicinal the ocean
smells to the ill
in half-winter

half-tragedy
gulls me, unwary, well-
bloodied eyebrows cut
speech through matchsmoke,

raised brow looks
legitimate as any, so I raise
you one squirrel’s
nest, because that’s the
pinnacle of political
perspective here.

Slow churches. Gopher battles.
There’s no sky like this
There’s no sky like this.

Mechanized mantra to
shred. No, anyone needs
to shred me, but it stings
to turn so cursive
to tack on a
a lieto fine through slow-
churned cement.
Gnaw the Skin, See the Bloodlines

Demarcations pinned
down, cuticle blood
used for swift
brushstrokes on my
music ledger
see I have
all of these
disorders I
want to change
into roulades, trip
rapid through
reeds and busted
bee cages, cycled
serenades, and
they would all
stay practical:
*reasons* for each ruin.

Blood makes
these deep
arguments,
percussive
roles.
The Meaning of Clean

Delirium of keeping dry
valleys in lacquer wares
viscous saps skin irritants
gilding uses once purified
*
Reduction of Function
provinces hiss
I am a grate debased
skyline all dust
*
Moving away from
moving away from murders
luxurious in favor
of balanced pastures
*
Clean lines silent “heart like
clock” metaphors
orchestral tightrope
heavy chiaroscuro
*
Degradazione or royal
upkeep Enlightenment
grateful
of male
stasis
to submit
harmonic
* 

*pulito
but no
word for
tremored
Reason:
lock me
please
* 

triumphs
reason
girl pleased
predictable
gorge sacrifice
ragione
Yiddish
Innocent
nest
p’arww’ás
there
please
**Hack would be 100 this Year**

Damn these charming barbed parks, damn this day consumed

on a horizontal belt of south-lined

paper, and only distance sees its own
scrapes of terror narrowing on the runway,

blossoms light over cinched fields
growled with sad snow, what makes it

sad is its particle hardness at
root, at nucleus, we are asked to

not take flakes down to their essential
areas, and not to look at man with baggage

this way—depressive bouts, recent split
from wife and creed, look he wants

my body for a little, but I’m in the air
already in head winds at 10,000 feet,

chose the single un-reclining seat,
slurped the essential window to prepare

for the centennial anniversary of Hack’s
birth and the first Armory Show,

birth of the term *Avant-Garde*
in America— It’s 1913,

I search for Hack on East 14\textsuperscript{th} street,
I think I am wearing similar

slacks similar bowling-hat-baldness and have similar

loneliness, though I don’t deserve
any accomplishment of memory

in the Gashouse District.

Demolition of, demolition of, of.
Of Export

*  
On Fisherman Street,
I asked which boats
leak most, how much fur to
plug holes, where to
to stuff stale newsprint.

*  
Of course
there are many ways to lose
garfish, water, grain expressed
into a baby’s mouth. Or you,
who downed a friends’ breast
milk, said it tasted of
coconut, sweet dissolves.

*  
I know it is selfish to want
the Navajo rug to
wrap me in a new opera
of evasion, transmute what
I cannot say about big topics:
carnival, limes,
rocks in the pockets
of other rocks.

*  
Mad scenes with clever
men. Docked sacred
codas. They say,
dance closer; you
are clever. All the
forgetting
seems key:
Rocks in the pockets
Rocks in nostrils
Buoyant cardboard
shaped into swan boats
Sunken irons
factory-cast
by grandfathers
from Moldavia
* 
Of apnea
and red flies
on the docks,
of little girls’
exhausting critiques.

* 
Of a body’s
willingness
to export
to admit a
dominant
agent with barbs
and paddles
into her
breakdown.
VERISMO, BUFFA
Dying Homeland, Still Dying, What About Yours?

Let’s not hate one another. Besides, I woke smiling from a dream in which you said to me:
“Just remember, you ARE those tacked-up-
dictionary pages on Randall’s studio wall.
You are the doll arms—what we discard.”
In the dream I felt flattered. Clean.
A blown-over barn door swept to your harbor.
Then Mandalstahm says not to be untied,
unmoored boat, ancient fishing net,
old testament smog brushing foreheads,
brushing back your erratic black orphic
cry, orphan cry, how else would we sing, anyway.
I can’t make this room tall enough.
I think we could sustain beauty while reading Osip’s war poems. What should we ultimately discard? Who’s family has it worse? In fog, Yiddish becomes a natural longing, an energized strategy lifted from Poplar, Greenwood, inconceivable rock formations, and yearning characterizes another Ism, so I’m wandering about this barren fleshland as one is understood to do in sustained periods of ache tempered by winds picking up the father’s voice through muffled tunnels.
Dramatic Cavatina

Remote held
note port connecting
awareness of
ensuing separation
acceptance to become bowed
Stranger Woman with
her Bel Canto always

a stranger woman where

did she when did she come—

now fewer opportunities for vocal
ornament now

estranged
Dream Gondola

My ears stuffed with
imposed order, strange

turn. Without guardians, I am
flesh-necessitating.

Fanfares for all births.
Weak marriage chant, bravo!

I contract carnivals, more masques, more
obsolete playthings, Now, says
the Common Man who is

exponent of
an abstraction, now, he says,

I will not touch you for one hour,
now we wake up to long

beaks near a canal, the zodiac
pediments passed over quick,

long time to remain
all water or nothing, long
time to swallow another

pilgrimage another
final mooring.
**Fluctuations of Certainty**

Whose good design may access

what constant qualification

implicit in your vulgate,

what bliss besides

being a contract, a sustained gaze:

Boughs or boroughs seen through boughs

Boroughs seen through

dirty -keyhole-cotton

I’m all water or nothing

I want the cities to crash under their own weight.

Stuck inside an arrowhead, unsure of

every involuntary

muscle contraction

Autumn, a spatial wreck

Autumn collapsed to fit
Always Your Audience

Never where all
    action is and the poem
fails to give action but

    steals a city we tried to
bridge and leaves a little

    chocolate for the train.

Turn vertical, where wooden shoes clap up

    a dirty beach, a man brushes

cigar ash from his leathered belly, no, no,
    that is me

    when I’ve gone too
captive with my ageing,

when our speech stays between
    cypress trees and thinning hair.

To feel so safe
it is awful, drunk and

    understated, this,
an evening piece, Mad
Scene. Suburban lane, 3 am.

Acorns stuck to kneecaps.

Mad scene transfigures this asphalt
to a Black Sea canal.

Still struggling to

jet across

half-bled half

ferried still waiting to

matter. Patience, strings,

ignorant symphony carry me--

notice how I

swallow every cracked

leaf, every square

city block.
“The Demon” by Rubinstein

Censor banned it, thought it stupid.
Lermontov poem, the atheist or
pantheist tendency, as I try to stay
made in American burlap, without you,
noble Common Man,

how many duels for Lermontov:
one and dead, for Pushkin,
etwenty-nine, and the librettist
Luigi Illica’s head is always
turned in portraits since he
lost his right ear in a duel
over a woman. The academy
of the future is, of St. Petersburg is,

I mean the conservatory,
future conservatory, possible dread,
practice dome of a reactionary
demon earthbound in love—
the modern productions suit the demon
in a white tuxedo, beneath a step-ladder,
scattered roses on set.
Twenty nine for Pushkin,
one for Lermontov, one for
Illica, successor fell
immediately, lost individual,
now I look for
different post cards, suits,
contrapuntal capitals,
people not difficult
to hold.
Always a Sailor Dressed as a Suitor in Opera Buffa

*The lieto fine (happy ending) soon became*  
a *standard requirement of opera*  
in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries.

Epics needed a shift. *How nice it was to laugh again.*

We come to

wheat fields wetting our sneakers

and now I don’t want to tell anyone what

little water I have left.

This dialogue simmers,

uncovered. A compliment and

no tree names, mauve covers revive

porch cracks in conversation.

You are more away than arm’s length, you

were sweet in a dream once.

I skirt the familial distance.

I warp you with harpsichords.

Gilded in these

baroque houses.
Small boats, small shaky boats crossing the Danube.

Small shaky boats crossing the Danube.

Read Dracula at age ten

shudder when Van Helsing passes through the Carpathians

What other ominous parallels.

Galatz shipyard. Not the prettiest harbor.

All of us wear tourist shawls.

All of us pet pigeons near shallows.
To Narrate Detachment

Too much tucked in the brims of men’s hats—erotic appreciation tokens. Minor foreskin. Almost-narrative. Here is where the personal should appear: While I’m in a Denver hospital garden, a hurtful man swallows each stair as he descends a metro. Still not personal enough. This becomes an American opera, “Street Scene,” a la Kurt Weil. Synthesis of European tradition and American theater.

Diaspora-

expulsion-

rejection  still not

American  fantasy of

not waking still

waiting to

begin
**Water Strings (Questions of Settling Down)**

Carpathian flute cry

breaks our rudders

Launches solid urns

into whitecaps.

You keep a strict schedule

listening for taut whole notes.

Soft wharf, far off and how old

is our helm, the topographical

rhythm of your half-formed blister,

ionic or doric we don’t know yet.

I want so much for you to slice me,

from clarified structure, sailor suit sailor

suitor, try not to stay

anywhere. What other precedents to

re-liquefy.
Intermezzo important,

Trying to stay made

all surface.

Skin carries too much sea.

Origins pared down.
Polite in the Pulpit

Hymn to
who said
_to be joyful_
in a moment
IS a radical
political act.

but I must
apologize for
seeing Man
as accident—
shoddy city
planning; countless
culverts, tweed
coat dams.

I could steal
all that extra
fabric for blindfold
summoning,
forge aqueducts
from thieves
remains.

No, I will keep
cursed keep
weak brows
reservoired
in this closed-
lip _Salve Regina_
hum.
Social

Yesterday I watched
clay boats shed
bits over Lvov’s trade port.
Then, a checkered tongue
slick on lemon skin.
Recently returned
from shipwreck,
I wrap café tables
in oilcloth, keep a close
watch on a chef’s knife.
Fables avalanche
onto the banquet table:
spill times I stretched
flames over your galoshes,
then stole gauze from the
warehouse next door
to patch them up.
I’m no good with parties.
From a wicker basket prison,
a small boy thinks your cheek
rubs a distant smokestack.
I tell the boy you traded one
smokestack for another,
ask him for his order.
He says he would trade
drawings of his room for
every blue-lit fence; for
a hat with light toppling
from its brim. Less light
-hearted now. I’m no
good with parties.
My grained mouth wanting
outs from your influence—
pale harbor, you.
The boy talks of battle
perspective, how visibility shifts
when you squint through
bent wood.
**Dislocation**

*Transition.*

Save the spindle,
    local girls at your spinning wheels, thread panic
    beneath sewer covers,
sew two-tiered balconies.

Flesh lies
in them, in carnival cat
    masks’ empty eyes. I hear the
    Westminster Choir
sing in Spoleto
    hungering for arrival, as
terrace gardens
    drip onto sister
cities.
Who Am I Talking To Why Can’t I Get Out of Here

Construction stalled in smallest

phrases only

social formulas

allow the crust to settle before

some blast emerges

spiced out of your

deat, Verismo, piccolo

strains instantaneous

beauty-fed

determinism caresses

at noon, why can’t you

let this fig be beautiful when it’s on

its own and sucked, you know,

rafters give way to command,

sun-left,

these sheets don’t know

another crater near the knee

comic trope, a marriage closets

dark dirges un-sacred—

Ohio birth

stones mistaken for foreign

provinces
**Begins with a Father’s memory**

of Stuy Town Classic-Assimilation, ends

with a tune most diluted and
carries how we write today in its body

sack. I don’t want to reuse, to
keep novelty between gallons

of wax and trills. Sit with me
in this pine pile, it’s too
difficult to get to the museums.

I guess I want to say:
Common Man, come

back! I’m Henry Wallace
giving that speech in 1942

I suddenly have a Christian
consciousness for cleansing!:

*The birth of the century*
*your century* sorry

to get birthed
in wartime.

Now then the time to rub
marble on our faces in this

Duomo crypt, as we stand before
Saint Cyriaci without swallowing

Catholicism, let statues all come
to a head, let all

itinerant parties sew dust bunches

over sewer grates over each city face if Aaron
Copland is really dead after

the common
bed, the hero for our war
effort keeping slick his
trombone, watered
down this city
an exponent of dry

granite all bass
heads rubbed

raw all trembled
bones.
Origins

I am thinking about how to make a more resilient leather. I think dyeing goatskin with sumac does this. You are thinking about how to construct ruins. Constantine’s foot, for example. This postcard of a tiny cat resting on his big toe lets you reflect on expanse and ownership. Still, I worry the pigeons will find us and chip away at our limbs. You wonder how to make skin flame-retardant and I say to hell with the cat postcards but I love them I love them look how small.

This cathedral we are standing in front of might collapse and become a marble pile. Expanse and ownership. So should I steal Constantine’s toe. The toe is too heavy to transport in hands. Seems cannibal to transport in mouth. Why are you turning. Why is your chest caving. Maybe from those cinder chips we ate; we thought they were crackers of origin. We needed a center again. Could we agree it is good to have a landing spot. A body of bread. Plaster torsos split by light.
Twice-Removed

I see the harbor drying its legs on tossed blood cloths. Counterparts, consolations. But it can’t be entirely true that no man is a hero to anyone who knows him blemished excess of honor. Enough applause. Don’t forget the salt.
I Want to be Located Somewhere Significant I Want to be Found

Held at gun’s ledge in dim apses cathedrals

palsied like a hell these transepts given over

you butcher shellfish (emphasis on free moral action) Could you condense this passage

scene incomprehensible Live Oaks drench the tongue

Spanish Moss to save nowhere transfiguring

inland some borders collapsing a herringbone

terrace
Foundation Slanted, Ninety Degrees

To find the trailer backed against bent sedge

Plaster, sidelong, lived alone.

To meet an architect’s tension, to catch your appetite for iron. For grout.

You play out rusted hunt scenes.

Your center is salvageable.

You don’t need my help.

I’m cowering beneath this counter dripping for more natural inversions. You don’t need my help with these columns. Spread-

eagle on a dirty train platform. Pier stretching pier caving to groin.
Left Alone, a List of Wants

Pensiones full of blood-letting, piled

   pumice rivulets
   almost

known, Umbria

   postmarked closer,
the baritone to play Masetto,
   oh wait, he is.

All I have done is cut out

   lakes on his bedframe,
while shouting

Batti, batti, o bel Masetto!

Triumphal closings.

Necessary condition:

   to worry about roof indents,
helpless roles, sweat

   curls. Please gush
me, sun-spatter, touch

ground later—

   use whose hands later.
Out of Sequence

Recent visit to actor man’s apartment. That torn narrative stretched, unexpected. Exposed on another corroding coast. On the pier, his pennies smacked into mine. The dream left knee-backs pouring.

See the Museo Archeologico Nazionale delle Marche, holding relics from the Iron Age and from the civilizations that peopled the Adriatic coast.

Someone just left to dredge my nearest reservoir. You met the real one, the real Don Giovanni...I would pay all my money for one more night with you.

No anchors. No anchors. No anchors.
Out of Sequence

—

Plucked figs fermented into vodka, improper appropriations, dim apses, ribbed vaults, mass en mass. The bar owner calls me up to the stage, welcome, Pussycat. Am I Henry Pussycat now? I wear a wig. All of it melting. Vague knee bruises. Only passing through. Only passing.

—

A sunnier line. Natural self-exposure. We know the sound of two hands clapping, but what is the sound of one hand clapping, asks a young father before he is a father. We leap awake and what we see fells us.-W.C.W.

—

The Hollywood graves look genital.
Out of Sequence (L.A. Morning)

Woke in one hot
sheath, sweat-drenched,
Japanese candy

wrappers stuck to
both inner thighs.
Arrived again in a man’s

low cell, far from the third
Duomo step.
One bottle of red and

boiled-egg-eyes.

Time to say,
dying is too
easy, family.

Here we lurch, working
musicians. Heavy good

bodies. Lowcountry
dives. Ask for what you
want if you want

to get over. Lift
another upset tune,
Sir Basso Cantante,

I’m unavailable and
Tarmac-soaked.
Several Contending Passions of the Agents
Brought into Conflict by the Circumstances of the Plot

Characteristic of a Metastasio
libretto. Fantasist—don’t be off-put,
yet. I remains distant
not to offend or
get any closer to
the real sad. Every sound
a disguise—each castrati
waiting to bop one ear drum
off its fulcrum. Ensemble
itching to de-pant
the aristocracy, but
Metastasio’s lit
too pure. Troppo seria. Static!
Is there a way to bridge
his librettos and
traditional Klezmer
melodies since I can’t translate
In Ades, alone, each section
gulping down any
votive any habit
any branch any wind
storm forming a caravan with
fewer hinges to oil,
arch arch arch,
circumstance! Total
result: backyard belling
itself in bloomed dirt
with minimal regard for
hierarchies.
As I Sit Here Misreading Everything I Wrote for the Past Two Years.

In my notes the word “seven” looks like “semen,” so the phrase I jotted reads, “Ink dries in six hours or semen, maybe less?” If that’s one offer, that’s the relief. I’m so sloped. I don’t retain rules for socializing. I have the strength of a diffuse root. Such character in this phallic marble statue. Semen minutes until the bed sheets dry. The cadence sharpens the breath, not the penis. We could only get to evensong, anyway—ease was wishful. Hardy’s thrush, not Keats’ Nightingale. We need heated jasmine, and a cradle lake to ferry across on the second full moon this month. What to fiddle in. Symphonies composed by Germans conducted by Jews. I’m looking for a country I have no ties to. Nice dream adjustment. A pool moving away, clean line. Your comma really kills it, and I can’t get closer to you than that.
Continuous Mishearing/Misreading

Sun gradations. Subway leaves over feet in the fall, oh stop oh stop writing about how beautiful October is, Schuyler! You know it’s the worst month! Why say seasonal delights when it’s always some season, some luxury of slight compromise. Grandpa Harold’s nickname was “Hack,” and I want to adopt it since I never knew him and my seat’s gone sour and I wonder about lost Odessa. I keep misreading “New Moral Order” as “New Moral Odor,” I think that scent should be of the acorn variety, or almonds with their veins budding while heads still break over the Hoover dam, while I spill a little oil on each nipple to correct my cupcake measurements but not really since the only thing I climax over now is raw silk. Dawn is the slimmest figure, a time to traverse narrow branches, but I said “brunches,” personal sensibility of narrow brunches, mishearing a common cognitive process, but what is that called this parallel transmission of phonemes. Traverse brunches through the grand canal while nauseous, state of variable throat-stops, the itch of asphalt and floods will make sense has to make sense the itch of ports and holding cells will make sense and I will explain it in an opera as soon as my dead relatives get back to me.
The Too Soon Aria

Conscious effort to keep orchid-faced in front of girl distressed.

God, I crave her
lashes like gum bark or thicker—

cardstock voyeur with her arm
around Common Man, not stiff,

six second hero, he’s safe
from every outer war, evens our
dirt. I gushed too soon
for you, tall sir, caved from

how we fit—lovely, lateral
cum—you are sweet to let me

scale baseboards with raw tongue,
lap and chatter and raise my
decibel muscles one louder.
**Una Corda**

What piazza-
sliced man
serenades
with this
Schubert
lieder?

I have become obsessed with keys
and the wrong things to say to a person.

Sentenced to a
colder year

Berryman scratched out: *Work while you can,*  
  *his hopeless spirit thrived to him to say*  
  *along those treacherous coasts.*

Hammered,
timbre, bass
cliffs. Go ahead
and touch your
chord.

I'll wait for anyone to finish playing, then paddle outland in
overstated strokes.

How clean
the coasts
can act.
Understudied

I’m desperate, see, I’m quacking out crates of beef extract and rumors. Last coffin of the day and all overtures ended. What frontier this cools, what language. I’ll be right back so we can listen to our father, our father says no, says there’s a dopamine drop that’s inherited, a radiator hiss. What a bargain in the absorptive moment, how clean this dissuasion of seditious uprisings, endless signifier, stay please stay please, who just became full of Catholicism in the gas lamp’s purge, say you still want to keep one with a world, when you talk to your children about breaking centers, counters, blondes—I have trouble with the narrative moment of revelation, the brief meeting of groin and growl, oh, my piers end in quiet cadence, behind two beams, masculine curtains, balcony flops.
One Woman Production of Mozart’s *Cosi Fan Tutte*  
*(All Women are Like That)*

Apotheosis of singspiel, stretched  
wet figure laughs at that setup.

Little thief little notary song.

I have immense coins to swap,  
broken tinctures, kids to get

back to Italy so I can sleep  
with their father.

I’m not in on a joke, but I  
appreciate the resistance  
to common rhetorical  
measures.

Now the world is not a lap  
that submits to my whips.

Looking mezzo or castrati  
on this barstool,

I’m uncomfortable with  
wood chips plunged

through my chin—  
disguise *buffa* beard,

orchard of pelvic turns.

Alfonso predicts  
all women will prove  
unfaithful inside  
steel pianos.

Do I want to remain  
placeholder, porcelain veneer,

always elsewhere in the 18th  
century, coffeehouse in Naples,
coffeehouse in Spoleto.

A recent divorcee and I
dialogue Umbria,

but the wrong Umbria.

De Ponte would giggle in
his descending revels,

tickle our diaphragms,
thrust our discourse into

fun fiancé-swapping—
common 13th Century themes:

Discontent, happy
cargo interchanges, gullets

locked in encore.
Dying is too Easy, Family: Where Did the Songs Come From?

I am blot on
mole on Common
Man’s beak. I play

buffoon role,
maid in mail slot,
veiled sailor, water-

skidding gypsy
in cul-de-sac
costume.

I trace ancestral
frowns, every trawling
net, I try to pin-stop

on the moment our music
birthed, when a blood-
tied woman pulled

accordions out of her
swollen larynx,
and gifted me these

current actions
of break and
gush.
Questions of Current Atmosphere

“But we have not yet reached the fervor of dark eyes and our setting is blue.”
-H.D.

Then it’s three years since—since displacement

then it’s flesh on

foil and planks spilling out oilcloth

remnants—then we are formless,

but choosing berries wisely on the dirt

strand watching a man carve nipples out of

cypress—watching him swell—

The Venus of Willendorf passed through here

two years ago on a whim

before she was buttoned up

at the belly and said well it has

always been today we are always

getting older under

suspension bridges, doomed

     cities, and fish grow at a rate

     that increases with time always

you say to me as we now sit

     on the lowest cathedral step choking

down wine pushing threads through
our wrists in attempts to resolve
various meanings of *clean*,
as seen through fogged boundaries—

I don’t even like the meaning
of you gagging on warped glass—
just the sound in the mouth—
just the sound in the mouth might
fashion something to see out of later Says:

the Tunisian man and his impossible
want for us Says: the father’s negative silence
Says: a misread tympanum on the unnamed church
Says: the sitar snapping its strings as it is hurled
into the
Adriatic.
Bibliography


