The Certainty Dream

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ABSTRACT

The Certainty Dream

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Descartes asked, how can I know that I am not now dreaming? *The Certainty Dream* deals with questions of identity, of reality and of the integrity of linguistic representation of the self through poetry. The poem, the mind, the body, and the world become an interrelating series of overlapping circles, all acting as containers for both knowledge and uncertainty. Eschewing the traditional language of philosophy, these poems operate by semiotic transference, allowing us to know something by first recognizing it as something else. Many of these poems employ loose associations, illogical connections, fragmented narratives and run-on syntax to postulate other ways of knowing.

Two primary threads inform the manuscript: a series of dream poems and the character ‘Mynah’. Mynah is not a literal mynah bird but an aesthetic object that the speaker uses as a mirror for herself and the world. The dream world and the waking world blur together; the poems in each landscape are similarly strange and uncertain. In a world where “duplicity is always shining forth from ordinary objects,” one is never sure whether an object, and by extension the poetic self, is real or a mimetic representation (i.e. part of a dreamscape). The dislocation is epistemological, and the poems thus become the speaker’s visible negotiation of her own identity in the face of uncertainty. She is not convinced that she exists as more than a symbol, a representation of herself. Trapped in her own narrative, and her own mind, she isn’t sure she has access to anything verifiable. Alongside that doubt, however, poetic language and associative leaps become a point of verification.
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“Pascal’s Wager”: ARC, no. 53, Winter 2004
For my father, John Hall.

Thanks for the jellyfish poem.
I have even lost the precise comprehension of what I seek and yet I am engaged in the search.

Jean-Paul Sartre
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A FEW WORDS ABOUT THE SEA

The vastness of the sea is missing. It is called blackbird.

Blackbird recollects mast, rigging and hull intact floating out there.

Blackbird until a swarm of dragonfly-looking things.

Blackbird in the well.

Blackbird in a circle closes around and eyes a sandwich.

Blackbird then the throat.

Blackbird loves the dog and hates the baby.

Blackbird misses the throat.

Blackbird sprays the eye and screams.

Blackbird appliquéd over top and peeling back.

Blackbird gives way and the inside of the earth.

Blackbird like an unfinished basement.

Blackbird lives among the Vikings.

Blackbird holds up a bulldozer like a trophy.

Blackbird sums the ending except for the guilt.

Blackbird is what blackbird wants.
you have felt the world shrinking
all this time you
feel yourself growing into it you
let yourself be the shape of it yes
you are in the graveyard yes
it has gone too far the sky
has turned
into a replica of your mouth
and you are about to swallow
the whole world with you
in it you know
it was meant for you
when you dance with it
in the street you let it
lead and it takes your wrist
your hip ever so delicately your hip
you gather your small things
you have felt it coming
all this time you
have nothing to call it yes
you are in the bus station with
everything spread against the cold floor
yes you are scratching against the place
where no thing is yes you are
WE ARE BUSY WRITING ANIMALS

I looked at you looking at your miniature horses
your model boat with its small captain’s wheel.
You must have gotten smaller to fit yourself

into that space. I must have. At some point
I was at the stern and you were alone
at the bow with your kaleidoscope.

We paraded too many living things
into that tiny vessel. Entirely new species could be made
with overcrowding. We were busy

on deck. Afraid to lift that wooden door. The lions
might be the same old lions that populate
every plain and we were ready for something new.

We thought we saw land. We wanted land.
Many blocks of sentences make a nice castle

You can go on saying but you can never recover the pattern of small roses not even in *the pattern of small roses*. That’s the crack in the sidewalk you turned into a shape. So drop it. The window needs to be fixed; it’s gaping. Neurath decided the body of knowledge is a raft that floats free of any anchor. We have to stand somewhere. Repairs must be made afloat. Feeling of impending disaster: he liked detective novels and puzzles too. I scrabbled my name into your book. It became my life. That’s the beauty of it. Riddles are much heavier than tea leaves because they make points of intersection: ask and answer. *We are not forgetting the patience of the mad, their love of detail.* When you say it like that I cannot know if I’m really knowing. There are socks in the underwear drawer. Who can argue with that? Our mothers were both in the kitchen clanging pots, standing back to back so I could measure and see who was taller. Astigmatism makes me see double. Disaster in the bathtub: contained waves, small splinters of wood drift around you as you move. My life doesn’t make sense. There are always elaborate coffee grounds at the bottom. Because of this the poems in the closet are on hangers but they no longer fit. I thought of that. Also of liver, kidneys and lungs as drying fruit. My autobiography unravels there. Only forty-five years. What happens at the end of the book? Tomorrow I won’t speak. I’ll walk everywhere and barefoot. If I can’t walk, I’ll swim. If I can’t swim, I’ll crouch pressing one hand into the dirt to steady myself. With the other, I’ll gather twigs.
In dark churches, certain boxes
are locked. I'm one of those tourists
who, when held back from the incorruptible
by an iron railing, jostles
for a peek at the small window
you can't really see through.
There's no one at the prayer candle place.
We've lit all our wishes on fire
and they give off too much light.

On a commercial break I start wishing
the blue volleyball team will win.
When they do, the final point
is scored like this: the ball is a white streak
right down the line and no one
moves to receive it.

If they play again, it will not be today.
Today I have a lot to answer for.
Fifteen people are jumping but fifteen people are crying
and only a fine webbing separates them.

I hope that something in the locked box
will make up for this. Is it a real heart?
Because a real heart would stink
and rot and fall apart. Behind us, fire
is sucking up wishes. It's melting
the pillars they're standing on.
Little Essay on Genetics

It's possible to love your mother
even though you're genetically deficient
and she's genetically deficient
and our deficiencies make a big hole
in the ground. Eventually we'll come to a place
where each of us will have to decide
whether to get cremated or buried in a fancy casket.
Richard Dawkins said evolution is about the genes
*manipulating the bodies they ride in.*
Little girls wish for ponies
without realizing that their parents
have already turned them into genetic horses.
We are encoded but we have not yet
completely broken ourselves.
Genes can suddenly turn on
like a light bulb. This is a cause of
cancer. God we are amazing
biological gadgets. They cross-bred
two strains of mice. The genes
are an instruction book, an identity
machine. The rats are right; I am frighteningly
like my mother. We are hardly here.
SURVIVAL MACHINE

The container for water
and information. We drew on
rocks. We figured out the word
sea. We figured out the words
basin and submarine. I shattered
a glass washing the dishes. I banged it
against another and underwater
one of them had to give.
I used to be a great birdwatcher
until the kingfishers flew
away and I missed them
and still understood nothing about flight
after examining the wing structure.
It's a beautifully invented design. It’s a consequence.
Extinction. Sea basin.
The kingfishers. Submarine.
In a dream disposable straws are used
to download and upload information—
a process involving invisible marine organisms
and soggy computer chips.
And resurrected kingfishers which are a mystery to me.
Evolution. You took off your black sweater
and went to bed naked. It has never changed.
Right from the beginning
it has been what it is.
For water. The container.

* Title taken from an essay by Richard Dawkins
THE SHIPPING CONTAINER

There must be a method of transport because there are regulations about the movement of dangerous goods. You made me a photocopy. I've started worrying about getting the proper transportation certificate which requires the inspector's signature, which requires believing there is an inspector with the authority to okay me. There are moments when a dog will hear what you cannot. The bark is a warning at 92 decibels. Because you hear nothing moving out there, fear is vague and continuous. Quiet is a command that registers only 7 decibels when spoken aloud. I read your note about the beauty of the immune system and the mathematics of the brain. How would you like me to interpret this love letter? It weighs next to nothing and ends abruptly. It's true, the container has great aesthetic value but I was really hoping for a free watch with a rechargeable battery or at least a better kind of nothingness.
A BRAIN OUTSIDE THE BODY

Sliced kiwis are small stained glass windows—opaque but bright and artistic.
In an anatomy lab a class sees
a sliced up brain. Each cross-section
pressed between glass, it's a slide
show. The cadavers are over there
but brain slices stack up for better storage—
paper-thin so that light
shines right through.

If someone else jumped off a cliff,
would you? I think I might.
But then again, I might
throw myself over all by myself
or stand, look over the edge
and throw kiwis instead of stones.
They're hairy little paperweights.

It's a long way down to whatever is down there.
Kiwis, stones or myself, I'm still
at the top and I'm still falling.
It's a stupid process. I'm always
waiting for myself to get out of the way
and watching and throwing.

If the light shines down
at the right moment sliced kiwis could
look pretty before they go. It's nice
if things can look pretty
even if stained glass windows
are craft and not real art.
I don't think the kiwis will make it
all the way to the bottom. I keep
letting them go but finding them
in my pocket later.
At the market, the man with his hand
in the boy's mouth is missing.
"Where is my house
when I am here?" I say to my friend.
All this is spoken in gestures
I am too tired to perform.
The boy will be mute
in a case this morning or left as fabric
strung over a kitchen chair.
I fold out the bed and lay myself across it.
I cannot find it in myself to rise.
A bath towel I hung in the window
serves to block out light. Outside, there
is a crossing-sign with a lever that rises
and falls in front of the metal rails.
If I could see the sign through the window,
I would go and stand under it. The metal contraption
that blows by would be out of date
and I would still watch it pass. As the rattling exists,
we are held back and saved. I am waiting
for the leaf to let go. The towel is left
in the window. The leaf is a gesture I cannot see.
I will not know when it falls or
what this will mean. The sound will not
be loud enough to hear. My friend wants to drop
coins in the case where the boy used to be.
She wants to drop coins when there is a hollow
where the boy is missing and the man
is moving the boy's mouth. She believes
the boy can speak for himself or
the man can speak for him and she imagines
it is enough.
Mynaḥ Speaks

dis cover saonan hols one bird
the bird sets off no alarm
only moves as his shadow might
flap across the snow

I tucked my tongue into him
I wound him by a handle
now say you hear the gears turning
now say you hear the sound of arrest

I set a bird in front of me
and a book in front of him
on the book two hands performed
a gesture of continual separation

over the bird I threw a jacket
I wasn’t gentle enough
to save him I cannot
find the cavity where I left him

a crow-bird held another
bird I dropped them both
thirty feet onto stone no gashes
visible here nothing

between the release and the impact
time sounds like a bird strung over the abyss
I tucked my tongue into him
he was flat he was a tapestry
On a field in the mud something gives.
Bruce blew out his knee. He slipped and bent.
Lifeguards recognize
the injured because they’re holding themselves
instead of swimming. The surface seals over injury
and injured. It’s the water that kills.

In bathtub races, we’re never sure we’ll stay
afloat. Seawater comes in over the rim.
Sometimes it messes up our plans.
In my bathtub boat, I’m giving myself first aid.
If I reach the dock
I’ll puke seawater.
What comes out will look nothing like what went in.
I’ve thrown up in a lot of different places
in my life and I hate to think
I just had to leave it there. Because briefly,
that part of the world was mine.

At the restaurant there’s a liqueur with a real pear
in the bottle. Bruce says they grow the pears inside
the glass. The fruit starts off sealed in.
When the doctor looked at Bruce he said
I’m going to give you a knee
better than the one God gave you.
There’s some kind of metal –
that metal was underground
and now it’s in there.
Bruce gets to carry it for a while.

The pear orchard yields beautiful
bottles. We forget to account for
wind. In a storm
the glass breaks. Around the tree,
there’s a ring of shards
we can’t cross over.
HANDS

"How am I to prove now that "Here's one hand, and here's another"? I do not believe I can do it. I should have to prove for one thing, as Descartes pointed out, that I am not now dreaming."  

G.E. Moore

Suddenly awake in a dream about bubbles,  
in the middle of a calculus equation briefly solved.  
Someone built me a ladder. I never said I wanted one.  
But, when I miss a rung and the whole thing teeters,  
I cling to the structure. The falling will be the worst part.  
The very worst of it.

From time to time, the bubbles I make drift upward.  
They gain a certain measure of sophistication.  
I replace them with planets. In my zodiac—  
isolation, guilt and humiliation.  
Here I let corrugated-cardboard  
Saturn stand for everything I'll ever suffer.  
Now Saturn will always be the bastard planet.  
Always — the hotel's flashing vacancy sign that is really a wobbling circular stepping stone  
in a bankless stream.

Who built this ladder I have to rely on  
just so I can conclude that I am perched on it and shaking?  
The syllogism causes our argument to fall over and over.  
It really does. The premises are wrapping paper  
on a birthday present I sent to myself. When I get it,  
the festivities have already started.  
How can it still be a mystery?

If the calculus proofs on the chalkboard  
didn't erase, I would be happy.  
Yes I would. Happy like Moore in his knowing,  
when he extended his arms and turned  
his palms up, one at a time. With a different accent,  
he could have been St. Peter on the wind-swept rock  
dreaming up a house for God but believing  
in a shelter of twigs called evidence.
EVERYONE I HAVE EVER SLEPT WITH, 1966-1996
(after Tracy Emin)

It was a day use shelter with too many seams. The rain kept getting in.

Too big for their own private sea, they were afloat in it afloat

in the pond. “Slept with” really meant “slept with” in the embroidered tent.

The stitch count was an estimation. The thread was Lightning Bug meaning yellow. No red,

no blue, which indicated lack of natural light. Too small for their own private sea,

they were walking all over it without even noticing. They had one foot

covering the tiny beach and the fabric refuge stuck into the pattern on the bottom

of someone’s sandal. It was hard to reproduce; it required square centimeters

on a piece of clear plastic laid over the design.
THE DEVELOPING BATH
(after Cindy Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills)

If you reversed my telephone number,
would I answer? No, I would not.
Multiple characters are lost
in this play of the single person.
There is blackmail. I wrote the letters myself.
It’s me singing to myself in my kitchen.

I was designed for the dailiness of days
and terror, decisions such as where to sit in the sand,
or how to picture myself as only a scuba mask,
black rubber suit and two eyes in an aquarium.

In the mirror photo of a mirror,
I occasionally gather courage.
A lot of characters look like me
catched in different acts
so as to say this is myself in costume
as a desert blanket, as a colonnade,
as a suitcase.
WATER TOWER, 1998-2000
(after Rachel Whiteread)

Where there is a harbor
there is water or at least a place
where water should be. How much
garbage can float around a single
pier? That's the ocean
where my pants got wet. I cried. There
was a prison. I saw it from the inside. The ocean
is not so big. Model boats depend on
one's ability to make water where there is just
a container. Architects build a pond—
concrete—and the ducks use it. The prison
in the field can be mistaken for Disney World.
Except the turrets look in. Looking out —
Guards, the sky leaks! There is art
unless there is too much missing
to ever put it together again.
Someone cast the inside of
a water tank in translucent resin and took away
the architecture so we saw emptiness
filled in clear-solid and there was
nothing to hold it.
MYSELF-IN-ITS-FORM
(after Claes Oldenburg)

1
Soft Bathtub (Model) – Ghost Version, 1966

The emergency dinghy somehow deflated.
When I reached out for
the bathtub it was pliable and my fingers
sank into it and I was digging
my nails into myself and the curved impressions
were symbols. In the morning I seemed so solid
I pulled my orange sweater
over myself. The builders had drafted
the bathtub into the blueprints too casually.
It went in before the walls. The sheet
over it protected it from dust and took
the shape of it perfectly. The shadows
moved over the folds as the light changed.
The bathtub was being born underneath
and growing and I was waiting for it to emerge.
I am so sorry I pulled the sheets off,
my love. Nothing stared back at me
and the sheet flitted over it. If there were taps
they were just flat Xs. If there was a drain
it was an unstrung instrument. The bathtub
was drapery in hand. The flood came later
and the bathtub yielded and followed the water. What was left
looked like an acrylic bag big enough to zip up
a body. To first have form and then suddenly tumble into
the hole that was present before
any porcelain basin was there.
last night I overstepped the boundaries
of this continent I’ve grown a skin
too large for myself to hang in Daisy,
it’s not working Daisy,
your freshness hasn’t permeated
the material I’ve shoved the dark in
with the light even the jeans
turned white even the coffee
stain came out in time
for the wedding there’s no chance
of rain there’s no chance
of shrinkage you’re going
to put my dress on the line
with me in it there are grievances
about detergent and bleach and fabric
softener Daisy, you’ll think
this is about one thing and it will be
about many Daisy, the sheets blew away
and covered the garden say
say there will be lightning
to split the steel bindings and unmoor
the halves of the structure because what’s there
to hang me is so godly and perfectly
symmetrical and crushing
there is a bell we do not let shrink or ring
we do not take from the silver tree
there is a bell as fruit on handlebars we cannot grasp
there is snow and then there is green and then there is snow again
if just one handhold if only part of a wheel
nowhere to sit comfortably if a skeleton
continues or doesn’t underground
if I said help me fix it if I said you would
the playground fruit contains iron
as a body is a single handlebar
as a tire is a dark halo half buried
as the pedals sink further
there is a bell we do not let ring the fruit
we do not take from the metal tree
IV
Monument to the Last Horse, 1991

the farrier is an instrument
with instruments he brought the hoof
knife and the rasp
his nails pierce the quick
100 ghost hands tall we built
tack that large and shoes
something slightly equestrian
waits for the rider to notice
have pity show the iron shoes
like a masterpiece without legs
and break the living body
across the yard so that it can
finally be buried
Speaking of Orange Trees

I am growing orange trees. Others are busy growing human ears on the backs of rats with cells from a Petri dish.

Mine is a flimsy greenhouse with an aluminum frame and some foggy plastic thrown overtop. When I breathe the walls rattle but that’s about it. I throw costume parties for my orange trees and dress them up in bark and leaves and sometimes I let them wear fruit.

I turn my greenhouse into a monastery. The trees are happy here. I place stars on the ceiling and hang the moon as a disco-ball.

The orange trees I grew just to kneel in front of something. Searle says searching for similarities is a useful strategy for comprehending. But I know nothing about what’s at the heart of my orange trees. There’s a gap between us. Who knows how wide it is? I can’t stop breathing. These walls don’t stop heaving and rattling.
The Lost and Found Box

We are waiting for the claimants to come. You would like to keep the purple umbrella. I would like to keep the orange tree. We’re hoping no one will claim the blue, beat up dictionary. The dead won’t give anything away. They carefully pick through the big pile of junky objects while we crouch reverently in front of it. A crowd is fighting over the morning star and the evening star. There’s only one star in the box. It’s stretching thin between them. Fault-lines are emerging. People approach from every possible angle. Secretly, we’re hoping for disaster — a chaotic free-for-all so we can make away with as much as these arms can hold. At the door George Herbert describes an orange tree to the admission clerk. As he glances around, I step in front of it and wave my arms like branches. I feel a little bad because he wants it for God and I just want it for myself.
LETTER TO MY FATHER

Dad, The birds in the backyard are all squawk and caw. You want me to write: the forest would be a quiet place if only the bird with the prettiest voice sang.

You used to read me a jellyfish poem. The poet was really mad at Hume because of his theory about existence. How you could only be certain of your own, that is. I was obsessed with it but not because of Hume, because of jellyfish. I’d never seen one before.

At the conservation area you’re always trying to point out the pileated woodpecker. Apparently he’s impossible to miss with his huge red comb. I have astigmatism. I can’t see a goddamn thing. He’s rap-tap-tapping away. But you’re almost deaf. As birdwatchers we make a good pair.

At a point, Dad, certain doors in my house blew shut and, although I’m running around trying to keep as many open as possible, that’s that.

It comes down to video games like Duck Hunt. A fake gun, pointed at a fake duck, shot a fake bullet. Then a fake dog went and picked up dead birds. That was really all I needed to know.

Dad, Once you asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I hadn’t realized that I had to become something else. I chose the seven feet tall and bulletproof option. Now I understand that although such things can be useful, they tend to be freaky. I’m not seven feet tall. But then again, I’ve never been shot.

What do you think Descartes was for Hallowe’en? Some philosophers think he was a tree branching off in totally different directions. Sosa thinks he turned his mind into a building but without any specific location. That way any two floors could be supported by their relationship, the foundation supports everything. But where is it?

It’s important to mention I went for a walk in the graveyard. There are all these safety deposit boxes full of ashes. I lean on them to keep myself upright when it’s really windy. In a sick way it makes me feel better.

Dad, I haven’t been a homeowner for very long. I don’t know what to do when my foundation is cracking. Who am I supposed to call? What am I supposed to ask?

Truth is, I’m tired of listening to birds with crappy voices. Take the crows in the strawberry patch for instance. You can’t argue with that. The woodpecker is ok. He just keeps the beat; at least he doesn’t try to sing.

Dad, I wanted you to troubleshoot some of these problems on your computer. I thought they’d make an interesting shape. The woodpecker is in a wobbly elm tree. They’re both
made up of binary code and he's trying to pull zeros and ones from under the bark. It's all he can do.
I invented the birdcall

I invented it with my hands, on the red-eye flight
by the light of the laptop screen.
I invented chatter then alarm,
quacking krek-krek-krek-krek.
At times I only managed three syllables instead of four.
In the air, everything came in tiny packages
even the dinner napkin. The man beside me
used his and let it fall on the floor.
It rested there inadvertently bird-shaped.
I made a logical fallacy and felt sorry for it.
So this was life now;
we were no longer grounded.
Mid-flight, I lost a piece of my sight.
It was jagged-edged but not dark inside.
Let the white places represent nothing,
just blindness. The world was broken then
and fleeing. I was left with a series of chirps
that were mine but too small to carry anything.
I meant for them to say help
but then, uttered, they meant
something else.
DEAR CHRISTIAN,

I am working in the absolute dark on the bus by the light of the computer screen. It is hard to watch the poem float away like a paper boat. We have not arrived at the right station. It's dark and we're at Albany (we have so much farther to go). Of all the people ready to receive this information you are readiest standing with your pants rolled up in the stream. I think you are concentrating. The water is clear and your feet are firmly wedged in the rocks at the bottom. Where have your sneakers gone Christian? Don't worry. It's possible to find them later downstream. They will float today. The bus will not be delayed by this particular weather problem. We are going to see the city dressed-up like a holiday. She kept playing the song because someone started in with a violin and it is so striking to suddenly hear a violin and frightening to stop lest your stopping stop it. I am counting on you downstream. I have just seen another bus pass in the opposite direction and I can see that I will return but not exactly the same way.
SUSPENDED IN THE SPACE OF REASON:
A SHORT THESIS IN SEVEN PARTS

(i) Abstract

Bats basically scream
until they hear their voices
echo off bugs and trees. Then they know
where they are and exactly what and how large
the thing they are hunting. If we had
a precise stopwatch we could tell
how far it is to the other side.
In the middle of the night even my own
breath sounds loud. I'm not an expert
in echolocation so I just open the fridge
and use the little light. I ate an entire jar
of chipotle-lime mustard. Half asleep,
I'm not sure why. According to a health pamphlet
asking questions is a roadblock
to real communication. Dennett says
we'll do whatever it takes
to assuage epistemic hunger.
My findings are inconclusive.
Yesterday I yelled at myself and
nothing came back at all.
(ii) Introduction

The words turn into a restaurant
where I can’t decide whether to order a cheeseburger
or garlic fried shrimp. For the sake of argument,
they taste exactly the same. We’ll begin in a vacuum with
artificial tools. We’ll assume the big bang was
the origin of the universe and there was
nothing before it. Nothing will be
a substance to suspend years of facts.
A game show will turn into a sparkly thought experiment.
People are running around behind the set but
god knows what they’re doing.
Faced with three identical doors, you choose.
Goats are hiding behind two doors and there’s a Mercedes
behind the other. Success with reality is the car.
The hypothetical host shows you one of the losing doors.
You have to decide whether to change
remaining doors mid-game. The mysteries are in need of
continual rephrasing. After seeing a loss,
change is always a good idea; it improves
your odds. I arrived on set. I started
at the beginning. I imagined the doors.
But the probability problem had been solved by
an advice columnist whose husband makes artificial hearts.
So I will try to love the menu.
And I will try to love the stage lights.
And I will try to love the goats when I find them.
(iii) Literature Review

(a)

The envelope of pills you sent arrived the same day as the shipment of elephants and disembodied voices. Skeptics do not believe we can prove we are not dreaming, but they are very glad for the existence of anti-psychotics. Exiled on a rock in the middle of the ocean, this haunting would cease to be a reality problem and become a mere disturbance. Stevens wrote many a sun and even a green queen into existence. Sometimes I understand I'm just an elephant in the crate of elephants left on my doorstep. Stevens was vice-president of the Hartford Livestock Insurance Company and in his final days at the hospital he confessed a certain emptiness in his life. Disembodied voices can be a kindness. Most people would never admit to having poetic conversations with a dead insurance broker but many have memorized his lines. There have been many philosophical arguments about the golden mountain. They've had a hard time claiming something non-existent doesn't exist. Meinong allowed for all logical subjects of sentences to have some kind of being. When the crate of giant cockroaches arrives, I don't know whether to find that reassuring or not.
(b)

When the window cleaner spills
into the sink and runs down the drain,
I try to imagine all the fish suddenly turning
belly up but all I can worry about is
the dirty mirror. As a drip from a tap,
water is not remarkable. But what we rarely
consider is that water is more dense
as a liquid than as a solid. Apparently, at the end
Tennyson was so short-sighted,
he couldn’t see to eat without an eye piece.
As a child I was afraid to go to sleep
in case I didn’t wake up again and went to hell.
I can’t remember when my fear was replaced
by resignation and I moved into the apartment
just behind the funeral home. On an exam,
one of the essay questions was *speculate as to why
"Crossing the Bar" has been "criticized for
a falling off in the last stanza." What could be
more obvious? What I wanted to know was:
why is God the pilot instead of the compass?
You can’t end with a poem about the end;
the poem is always a precursor.
There’s a bestseller that documents the suicide notes of
famous people. One guy addressed his note to
the whole world and said he was just bored.
Narcissus fell into himself because of
light rays and surface tension. The fact that ice floats
is a neat fact that caused a huge problem for
a lot of passengers on the Titanic.
Virginia Woolf collided with herself. She had to
listen to herself talk to herself and
she finally understood
she wasn’t going to recover from any of it.
Looking for the sunglasses I lost
over the edge of the boat, I stepped off
the underwater ledge. Down there, clams
were digging themselves small troughs
through the sand. It’s hard enough to accept
losing things let alone finding other things
you’re certain you weren’t looking for.
It took Virgil eleven years to write
The Aeneid. He wanted to burn
the unedited manuscript but he was too sick.
Dying sucks, especially when you start
to see beyond yourself, like your clothes
being sold for God’s benefit at
the Salvation Army Store, and by that time
there’s nothing you can do about it.
Dante wrote Virgil back into a kind of being
in his own story and then decided to go on safari in hell.
There are moments when considering that
you might be dreaming
is a comfort. The rescue team was off in Florida,
sipping those stellar cocktails under
a multi-coloured umbrella.
Whether they are fictional or not is irrelevant;
no one knew I was missing and when
the surface sealed over panic set in.
(iv) Methodology

We get jobs stuffing experience
into manila envelopes. I put
the thousand islands in one of mine,
hanging on to each by the pine trees
and dropping them in one by one.
It’s scary to loom this large in
the world of tiny experiences.
People are the size of ants. They’ll
carry their small purses and backpacks
and go about their business
while you can pick up the whole of France.
Somebody tells me they’re not sure
this is the right way to do it, and oh
the shakings of insecurity. I look for
the big boss and finally suspect that everyone is
looking for the same thing and no one really knows
whether it’s just a lunch break or the boss is
on permanent leave. So we continue
using sticker labels and writing in various
coloured pens and making it up as we go.
When the corners get torn and torn again in
the process, things sift out. Usually the finest grains
go first; usually it’s us. Sometimes I have to
imagine places I have never been and
stuff them in secretly. Sometimes I wish
the job satisfaction survey was
a multiple-choice questionnaire. There’s a point at which
we realize we have nowhere
to send anything. It’s amazing
how the envelopes start to pile up.
(v) Results

What's really happening is happening simultaneously in secret in the attic while I'm busy watching the morning cartoons. I buy a lot and build a house and everything goes well until it starts sinking into sediment. The ground is still the same ground I paid for but the house is not in the same spot. The problem is the frequency with which our diagnostic strategies fail. The gigantic margin reserved for wrong guesses. We're cellular interactions and brain chemicals we don't even understand.

My philosophical zombie is not a member of the undead but my precise physical duplicate only lacking consciousness. The question of whether zombies and zombie worlds are possible has huge implications for these theories of mind. These were not the results I was expecting. I had hoped for so much more.

We sent two robotic vehicles to Mars. They survived there much longer than we thought. The astrophysicists and geologists work from the data they collect in labs with glossy NASA posters on the wall. It always adds up differently but Mars stays the same. It was observed that once Mars might have had water on its surface. If we are truly the only aliens, we're pretty freaky. It's winter. I put on my mitts and wrap my scarf tightly over my ears. The snow is so different from anything I can think about it.

I hope there really was once an inland sea on Mars. I don't want us to be alone in this expanding, black space.
(vi) Discussion

(a)

Faced with a choice of lures
in the bait and tackle shop, I was forced
to rely on visual composition. In the absence
of any fishing experience, it became
a kind of Rorschach test in which I chose
spinner pattern 208. Meaning, I chose a tool for
dark days or waters where the forage base was
crayfish and other dark species.
The literature said the fish would bite. To achieve this result
required a lot of subterfuge. Each cast
had a plink that started a lure spinning
and blinking under the surface. Down there,
it must have looked like a beacon but
this is a trompe l’oeil.
Sometimes I get the urge to scream warnings
at the fish at the same time as I reel them in.
I never wanted to be the one to pull the heart out
and watch it beat its final struggle on the granite rock but
when someone else did I was happy to sit and watch.
The lake becomes a doctored environment.
When the fish get wise, we’ll think of something else.
Descartes entertained the possibility that an
evil demon was causing him to have false beliefs.
A philosophy essay warns that it’s important
to establish a basis for distinguishing
between persons, or between processes, in
classical demon-worlds. The ducks are really tragic.
They look at decoys and think
they’ve actually found someone else.
I have followed the only line of inquiry available to me and still, I think I’ll be judged epistemically defective.
Experience is a starting point for speculation, a point of departure from which there are delays at the baggage counter, delays at security, until eventually the flight is cancelled due to mechanical complications.
The weather channel is often wrong but when the sun and snow have already happened, they make gorgeous graphs that make a lot of sense of it.
Dad, your heart is working like a leaky battery. This can be explained by electrical impulses and wear.
An ultra sound specialist sees the shape of the imperfect container.
He’s a stranger but he has a better picture of our internal organs than we do.
I try to follow the rules of responsible evidence gathering. Cardiologists don’t necessarily read the ECG but learn to listen for the faltering beat, diagnosing problems by sound. NASA’s probe burned up in the Martian atmosphere because of a simple error. They forgot to convert to metric. A team of investigators concluded that mission planners hadn’t viewed the mission as a whole.
I’m not justified in my beliefs and I don’t really care.
In a room full of thirty people there’s a seventy-one percent chance that two of them will have the same birthday. Every now and then, the forecast is dead on. And no matter how much evidence I’ve gathered about the storm, the storm is still its own thing.
(vii) Conclusion

Tracking a package can be so easy, backward from any point to the source. Other times, my watch falls off my wrist and I don’t notice until I reach and it’s gone.
You are like an old cotton sweater—your bones clasped together by ligaments slowly losing shape and deteriorating.
The twin Mars rovers, Spirit and Opportunity, are going to be abandoned on the red planet.
They never had any intention of bringing them back. The watch was an expensive thing to lose.
The clasp on my necklace keeps giving way. That’s its own kind of certainty. In some ways, I’m waiting to lose that too. I’m waiting to find myself huddled in the empty bathtub. Some days I wonder if I ever had a watch in the first place.
I cried all through your speech about money and mortgages. I didn’t want to know that you could add up so many things and have them equal less than nothing.
INSOMNIA

If I were to sleep, it would be on an iron bed,
bolted to the floor in a bomb-proof concrete room
with twelve locks on the door.
I wouldn’t ask for a mattress
or decorate. I wouldn’t ask for beautiful.
I’d let in the philosophers
but not into my bed.
They’d come cradling their brass instruments.
I might let them play
but only very softly and only if
they didn’t fight or sing.

If I were to sleep there wouldn’t be any windows.
There would be a skylight
but in the middle of the floor.
I’d press my face against the glass
and stare down at other floors, upon floors, upon floors. . .
I’d do a sleep dance right on top of the skylight.
It’d be a new game.
It would involve amazing feats of sleep contortion.
It would involve letters.

If I were to sleep, I would be spread-eagled across the bed,
and even with the iron struts and screws cutting into my back,
I would protect the metal frame.
I would protect the springs.
And I will call you obelisks and you will call me nothing cranberries. And something cranberries will be made into sauce and the turkey will be stuffed with not toast. And the cranberries. Turkey prepared with pumpkin seeds and it cranberries. The blackbird comes crow eats and shits also cranberries. Underground he fed her kept her part-time cranberries. And everything the king touched it cranberries became solid in here cranberries. Continue. Everything moves forward because you cranberries. Is arbitrary and confusing and I am lost in it.
SCHRÖDINGER'S CAT

There is a cat outside my front door.
Sometimes I have a headache and I wonder what it's from.
It could be a tumor. Something I have made
from some crazy cells rioting in my brain.
Sometimes when I'm not at home I wonder
if the cat is still waiting outside my front door.
I bathe in futility. I try to make it fun.
I lose my toothbrush and I don't even try to find it
because there are so many stores. Everywhere I go
I could always buy a new toothbrush.
I count on this fact. I make it a game.

There's a square composed of flat polygon tiles.
It's called Stomachion. It's about equations.
They attribute it to Archimedes.
I really want it to be his game. Attribute means
it was probably conceived by some forgotten no-name.
You're supposed to make a tiled elephant. It's classic.
I want to make a cat. I want to pull the cat out of the box
and make sure he's ok. I don't want him
to suffer in anyone's thought game.
Decay, even on the atomic level, is cruelty to animals.
We try to make it fun.

At night I think about my over-developed sense of intuition.
It's not really a sense but it makes me happy.
It allows me to think I know without looking.
Sometimes it occurs to me that one day
all the stores are going to be closed
and I'll have to look for my toothbrush.
One day I'm going to commit some kind of cruelty
and it will probably be toward myself. I might not even know
until I have a headache. I really want the cat to be outside
licking his paws. I want him to drop dead birds on my doorstep.
Some day I'm going to have to get up and turn on the
porch light and check for him. I wish there was an equation
to explain this. I suck at math. The cat is made of polygons.
When he swishes his tail I hear the ivory tiles clicking.
At night he climbs the tree next to my bedroom window.
I sleep with my back to it.
THIS IS A DREAM LETTER

(1)

this is where the throat gives way and the Achilles tendon
we glimpse our black dog at the edge of the forest
we try not to stare
his ribs can be accounted for his hip bones
this is the version where you bear up the universe
you build an animal skeleton
you breathe life back into the dry bones
this is where I want you to empty your pockets
this is the version where you approach from across the field
and this is where we go gently
and this is where you rip out our intestines and stroke our hair
and this is where the water seeps in
(2)

this is where the throat gives way and the Achilles tendon
where I don’t want you to breathe on me
the ball of twine and the horse become one thing
this is where I am weighed in the balance and found wanting
this is the version where the lion is prowling the house the dog
tell me why you think we’re a diptych
tell me again
this is where we’re backed into a corner
and this is where you offer the dog a femur smash a hole in his head
and this is where we peer in
and this is where we watch the dog crawl around blindly
Wolves don't know who they are, only that
they are hungry. The promise of dinner stinks
and glares back at them from the snow.
I have to stare down a bowl of puffed rice cereal every morning.
No longer recognizable as rice, it's crispy goodness full of air.
There's a point at which every question
becomes rhetorical. What am I trying to say?
How can I get in touch with aliens or
God? Sometimes in a big empty field, looking
for dinner only results in snow blindness.
This should tell us something about the nature of the universe.
My sister has never bothered adding stairs to her back deck
so it just drops off. When she asks me anything out there,
I either say whatever or pick up the kids' pink dish soap container,
blow some bubbles and watch them float over the edge.
When wolves find what they are looking for
they circle, closing the gaps between them.
They crouch low and drool over it.
I can't tell what they have in there or if it's still intact,
so I'm just going to leave them here . . . circling.
PASCAL’S WAGER

If God does not exist, one will lose nothing by believing in him, while if he does exist, one will lose everything by not believing.

Blaise Pascal

We have a stainless steel pepper grinder.
When the kitchen light is turned on
there is another bubbled room in the bulbous top.
This is a problem. Duplicity is always shining
forth from ordinary objects.

Pascal’s equations arose because everyone was losing
at cards and dice. We like to play games but only if
we get to keep our shirts.
At the casino striped ties and slinky dresses
are made of calculations.
We show a lot of skin. We’re practically naked.

I waitress at a restaurant with limestone walls.
Pasta is the cheapest thing on the menu.
It’s very popular.
It’s my job to grind pepper for the customers.
What I’ve learned is this:
some people like a lot of pepper and some people don’t.
You can never tell.

Pascal understood that probability is triangular in nature.
Even if you roll twenty times and seven fails to appear,
there are no guarantees it’ll show anytime soon.

Cardan was also working on this problem
for noble reasons. He was in debt.
In an amazing act of mysticism he accurately predicted
the date of his own death. He had the probability thing down.
He marked the cards and rigged the dice.
They arrested him when he discovered Jesus Christ
was a Capricorn. Cardan loved pepper. I can sympathize.
I used to be a croupier.
I liked watching the dice roll across the green felt,
especially because it wasn’t my shirt.
Pascal, I think God would know
you were hedging your bets.
Cardan hedged too. He committed suicide.

The God equation is absolutely clear.
God might be hiding inside the pepper grinder
and there you are shredding him to bits
on top of your farfalle.
There you are gobbling him up
with the chunks of tomatoes and kalamata olives.
What are the odds? You can never be certain.
But Pascal can get out his calculation machine.
Throw in a few letters and the number two,
a few enzymes, vitamin C
and calcium so later his bones are first-class.
I’ll tell you the odds are pretty good
you’ll absorb what you need in your small intestine
and shit the rest out.
POEM TO RENOUNCE MY RENOUNCING

My apologies for not titling you
your grace or captain or
father. In the end
you didn’t call the unearthly
costguard to pull me
from the shoal when I’d had enough,
and couldn’t drive the boat
home. Unfortunate as you will deem it,
I’m taking it all back, each little thing,
and placing it inside
the old blue steamer trunk. The one
that has the faded orange tag, specifying
my name, destination, occupation:
tourist and instructs HOLD.
When my possessions are all there, together
as in the beginning, before
I learned to flush shit away and leave
myself empty and porcelain,
I’m going to climb inside
with all my crappy belongings and
breathe until I can’t breathe
anymore. But permitted to hold on
to my wickedness. Just that.
the lady asked directions
to the pier the same pier
buttressing every seaside town
take pier to mean support and
bridge to sea at the same time
if the polar ice caps melt I know
how to swim and there
are things they’ll save from the wrecked
house lintels, cast iron
railings, timber moldings
whatever is valuable enough
to withstand I would polish
your shoes for five bucks if
I could see the money first
let five rattle change
into the empty pot leave
something familiar I only remember
to put in punctuation sometimes
but pack in the explosives it’s imperative
I wanted the moth to make it back
outside the wings were
so orange the cat is more skilled
with the winged there’s a rush
endorphins in the body occur
in the absence of awareness the heart
wants to be deranged
I will watch the unbuilding
show me explosions
and I will reassemble
Vitrine

_Do not give the foxes names_, I said to the lady in the metro, _lest you turn them into porcelain figures._
I was testing out a series of statements for truth-value.

The floor tiles rose to meet me like the domino effect on rewind. It cost two dollars and fifty cents to arrive underground and feel sick. I was not pregnant.

I asked for an architectural construct to hold this. A better one. More of a burrow than this cavity in the ground. I was fostering an entire ecosystem under my shirt.

Crepuscular and omnivorous, the foxes were waking inside. Leery of tourist traps, they did not venture out but yipped for their dinner. The lady was watching me.

I did not know what colour my belly was but I was breathing. It will pass — all this horrible not being here and everything.
HEARING MYNAH I HEAR MYSELF

if I split mynah's tongue what kind
of prayer would I hear myself
say there were birds outside the window
the flock amassed they were trapped
in their feathers and watched me
clean dead bugs out of the lamp
when this string of words unravels
the mynahs will not know what to say
here I did not teach them to speak or
bear anything aloft my little electrical birds
they could have been mediators but then they were
merely here when it came time
I didn't know how to knit the shape of them
or mend didn't know how to make
an instrument out of duct tape
I didn't know if I was given a tongue then
or if the crickets were given
tongues in our understanding
what they would have to say
TIME

Here a girl makes clocks.
When the time comes,
I will make them
tick. A boy pulls up
in a blue mini-van.
I will make his motor
a metronome. The girl
hears it. She drops the hands
she is trying to fasten. In time,
I will make them clatter
on the floor, land here
and rest.

Then here I will make the boy lose
a sandal in the mud. Yes.
I will make the girl fall asleep
in a field of poppies.
Yes I will
make them drown in the flood
Yes.
Consider that this morning I realized the sound
I was perhaps dreaming was
the garbage truck—the contemporary
version of an epistemological shipwreck.
Consider it is not entirely clear.
I have two appointments in different
coloured ink in my day planner that supposedly
occupy the same time and space.
Sometimes we don’t get farther
than the toilet is clogged and
the cat puked on the floor.
Consider that certain other poets keep
cropping up, weeviling their way through
small holes and leaving hollow discarded skins
that are really my own Halloween costume.
Because I’m basically always
staring at the end that fails
to follow the planned storyboard but
works like a kaleidoscope and
who ever wished for a kaleidoscope?
You can’t use it to find land from the bow
of the ship. Pointless to rearrange
a bunch of colours in an opaque
telescope and decide yourself
what shape to call them.
THE FACTORY FACTORY

The programmer forgot to fill in
the papers about the papers about
somewhere there is a poem. It was
a small news story. I dreamed
the factory into the dream world.
Then walked by on my way to school.

How will I ever pack in time to catch the train?
My suitcase is bottomless and fits
an infinite amount of dirty underwear.
The most beautiful place in the world
is claustrophobic. A gigantic warehouse of
machinery created by us for us to create.

We scuttle up wooden stairs to find
a lookout without a lookout in sight.
It continues so far beyond the small patch of sky.
We hit a giant domed ceiling
somewhere if we could cut a hole in it
the rain would come in.
DREAM IN WHICH I AM ALLOWED 12 ITEMS

let me keep this shell and
line it with mucus
hung over the abalone walls
let me call abalone a house and
let it only count as one thing
count the grit to
keep me company please
allow me company let me have
sand and stone and let it only
count as one thing count a mouth
and fingernails count
days and nights as one thing
let me have a clock so I will know
when it’s time let there be enough
space even as the shell snaps shut
like an overloaded purse let me keep
the tools I have saved
needle-nosed pliers, severed
bird wing, cat-gut sutures let them be
tools let tools count as one thing
count a spoon and scale allow me
matches to devour the hardwood floor
let me lie there
allow me antiseptic but blind me
and take away the furniture
let me not wonder let me know
only twelve things the rest
let me wreck myself
MYNAH FLIES OFF

I am giving up repetition Dad.  
I will not be able to call your name any longer.

I'm going to have to figure something else out.  
I'm going to have to clip my tongue without a pattern from the dressmaker's.

There won't be a lot of blood.  
Someone will take me in and speak the words again for me.

It was me who clipped the bird.  
It was me who tagged its feet.

The dogs trampled it on their way out the door.  
I found it outside with its mouth open.

I screamed *I'm dying* but  
I presented it with more immediacy than it deserved.

The egg cracks as easily as this.  I've seen it.  
But I'm still waiting to see it mend itself.
Exiled from Alexandria, Ptolemy
drowned attempting to cross the Nile.
He was either fleeing or
walking toward negotiations.
Julius Caesar burnt enemy ships
in the harbor. It may have spread
to the library by accident.

Yesterday the house shook
and buzzed inside. I said
what the hell is going on.
And there was no one to answer.

Solar wind is just a result
of heat. I wanted it to be more
dramatic. The sun is so dramatic
when I compare my existence.

The 11:40 train departs,
arrives: 16:17. All the time
I’m traveling, I’m at a loss
for information.

The library was the brightest
it had ever been
when the books were being used
as firewood. It radiated
the way the sun does.
The corona is most visible
when the moon obscures the rest.

First there were ships in the harbor.
Then there were none.
What happened to the ships, I said.
LOVE, MYNAH

think of aging faster
if ever airborne
airborne add birds
bird bird
love bird mirror myself
he thought you were a sign bird
paper bird
hanging from a ceiling fan
injured bird injured
language suffer most
suffer bird
hanging from a ceiling fan
he thought you were a sign bird
god bird why
a place beyond this place
we cannot ever know
sky bird rifles through your stuff
erase bird as quickly as he appears
yes let them pluck
themselves out of existence ask
ask why here
ask where here
ask when here
here all it is made of is
my say so
THE CERTAINTY DREAM

The problem is coming to know in a dream. In mine
other people were sleeping and dreaming. Someone was snoring.
It was folded neatly over itself into an origami bird.
Tools were provided. For instance:
a limestone house, a package of straight pins
and a stone sarcophagus.

Origami is a puzzle. The creases are approximations.
The result is shapely. Certainty could be folded
into a featherless bird. Tossed in the air, it might not fly
but it would hover there for a few seconds
and shit all over the stone
before it could be shot down with plastic pins.
It’s equally possible that the dream house is not really
a house at all. But a bird, folded stone;
the pins cause indigestion and the sarcophagus,
a built-in part of the anatomy.
The difficult part is shrinking the sarcophagus
until it’s the size of a small jewelry box,
then to juggle it with the bird and the pins
so quickly they become part of one circle
without so much as a bruise, or a pin prick or a paper cut.
Briefly, everything is not a weight in hand but airborne.
DRESS-UP DREAM

mynah morphs into crow
stands for nightingale
don't assume abandonment
he needs a new name
not being himself anymore
if he is two
they talk at each other practicing
what they have learned they have to
talk emphatically to overcome
background noise how do they know
we dream every night build a nest
using anything available
tar paper and shingles plastic
bags pieces of fishing net
mynah paints over
his yellow eyes black changes
everything fills in the tips of his wings
he squawks like crow trying
to sound like nightingale
we sit across from crow
at the table recognize him
as mynah take from him
what we would take from mynah
ANTEOPE DREAM

There is an antelope in the dream Sarah.
When the spy nailed him in the drive-by-shooting,
we placed him here and he still stood for himself.

Sarah I'm at our house that never was our house.
The antelope have multiplied in the backyard
while we played cards decorated with photos of antelope.

Sarah the spy has fooled me. In the house,
antelope stink and snort but turn transparent.
They look like whatever they stand in front of.

The sky is falling Sarah. Cluck, cluck, cluck.
Our antelope are gone. You see chickens coming
out of the black forest where we wanted a herd.

Meaning something is missing Sarah.
The house is empty and echoes.
Antelope eat the yellow siding mistaking it for grass.

I laid the only quilt I had on the stripped bed Sarah.
I left it to protect the mattress where the antelope died.
The spy was only my shadow behind me all this time.

Sarah there is a priest in this dream of the empty house.
If it is not empty by the time you arrive, there will be a bed
and a quilt. The antelope are just sewn in.

Sarah the priest is holding the book over your head.
If he is the antelope, he will have to wear horns.
If you are the antelope, there might be an exception.

Meaning Sarah, we are waiting for the horsemen and the fire;
we are waiting for the antelope to speak.
But Sarah, the nothing that happens is scarier than all that.
This is the dream I dream again Sarah.
DREAM IN WHICH I AM TOO BIG FOR MY MIND

what could I say about the glass box
after I realized there were holes
for breathing after holes for seeing
after the sky was all around the sky
sealed in after I realized I was not
the surprise pop-up toy after the hummingbird
was a clearwing moth after research after looking
became another form of disappointment
and after the little figurine was in my hands
after it sprung to action after it mimed itself into
a transparent cube after I loomed above myself
after I wondered what kind of specimen I was
the one cracking myself open to see inside
the one stretched thin to hold myself shut
ONE POINT OF REFERENCE

Ascending from between twin cairns, we move cautiously, testing every step. Our sand is falling separately and the scree is what gives underfoot and the echoing fusillade is loudest. This is a travel log: a record of a record of record keeping. The ridge is knife-edged and we crush many alpine plants to arrive where it is going to snow. It snowed. When you see sparrows circling, you know they’re lost. But they see you and what they see are your clothes fluttering in the wind after a storm. Before and after you reach this point, you’re different things: you waited for the bus, you’ll decide to walk. It snowed throughout the afternoon. Here, we carry heavy packs. We prepare for every eventuality and sometimes we decide to leave these packs behind. When we say oh god it is an expression and not a plea. When you see sparrows and they see you, you’re the only visible point on the snowy ground. The snow buried the multi-coloured prayer flags. The icefall pours slow and constant. Roped together, we walk on water. There are crevasses and some we step into. When the rope pulls taut, we’re swinging below a slit of sky staring at ourselves frozen in the ice and we’re holding ourselves from the top on a thin rope too. The snow is the vessel. We imagine each other in the spindrift. We are blind and frozen and there are shadows on either side and they are also holding us. We gather ice. The snow-ledge is crumbling here and here. This is one kind of end. This is a record of the end.
WHETHER TO SCREAM OUT FIRE IN THE MOVIE THEATRE

when it’s my funeral
or just scream and go fetal
I think I should be waiting
for someone to cry
at my funeral
(your friend with the orange clogs)
I think I should be crying myself
sitting in the wings
and asking if your friend
will be in the funeral movie
or something
(I could set myself on fire)
when it’s my funeral
I think I should be willing
to let everyone feel
sorry for me
it’s my funeral
and a strange thing is happening
(I have lit a fire in the movie theatre)
I think I should be feeling
even sorry for myself
and let your friend panic quietly
at the sight of my funeral
(it’s in black and white)
But I really think I should be
the one panicking
at my funeral
I think I should wait
until it falls apart
(the roof gives way)
at my funeral
when it’s my funeral
I think I should scream
fire and go fetal and
scream out fire
in the movie theatre
when it’s my funeral
I will want to
(do something)
Mynah – Last Time

Mynah, if I knew how to play bridge would you love me better?
   I attached your leg to my key chain.
   I’m a bad loser. I didn’t win the award for sportsmanship.
Mynah, I crawled around in the pig sty and now I don’t know what I am.
   the distance between your house and mine is expanding.
   I can’t cross over the field.
Mynah, I loved it when you shot me. I deserved it so much.
Mynah, I don’t think I want to eat berries and insects anymore.
   my entire flock is of mediocre quality. The craftsmanship is shoddy.
   you are just a shapely hole I sometimes fill in with words.
   if I stop, we’ll have to sit in silence.
Mynah, if you left me a feather or a beak I could build you again.
   give me something to work with.
Mynah, I took a fish-gutting knife and cut off my toe.
Mynah, it’s possible to survive without a toe.
Mynah, I let the dog lose in the field and she swallowed you.
   the grass swallowed her. I swallowed myself.
Mynah, we can’t have this conversation another time.
Mynah, the wind doesn’t scare me.
Mynah, I didn’t think the wind would scare me.
DREAM IN WHICH I AM SEPARATED FROM MYSELF

I don't want to see the city through
myself anymore. I imagine an open body
stuck with pins and flags ready
for labeling. The city is a city of continual
sidewalk repairs and household renovations.
If I could lay my hands on the interior walls
I would know enough to miss myself.
The city is a city of streets named
after saints and explorers. On the dock
I am cold. I imagine myself
at an art gallery looking at installations
and not pretending there is
any sort of understanding.
But somewhere the water
may meet the unseen shore
and someone like you believes
it happens. There
is a line where they touch and
I would like to speak
to that line and have it speak
to me in return.
Mynah Dreams Himself Into a Statue

and when he came he lopped off the beginning
along with the feet in favour of the here and now
and when he came he repeated something quietly
in the empty room I built a skeleton

and he dreamt a piece of fabric to tie on the broken wing
and when he understood he was a statue the sea was a bathtub
he couldn’t enter and the rest was draped with sheets
he laid his shadow on them

and under pressure he was stripped and stripped again not knowing
how to lift the sheets to ruin the imminent surprise and he repeated hollow
and this became the dream his dream in which I did not allow him to speak
and the dream in which I imagined him speechless before me

and he repeated I am something
awakening on a back seat and who will swear the statue not accountable
the dream not accountable my tongue his
tongue an antenna and then

who will call out
and calling out who will answer