

Oyster & Bear

Sarah Burgoyne

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By: Sarah Burgoyne

Entitled: Oyster & Bear

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Stephanie Bolster Chair

Mary di Michele Examiner

Andre Furlani Examiner

Stephanie Bolster Supervisor

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

Date 12 April 2014

ABSTRACT

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Sarah Burgoyne

Oyster & Bear is comprised of both short traditional lyric poems, influenced by the Persian form known as the ghazal, and long conceptual prose-lyrics constrained by excessive uses of singular parts of speech (for example, prepositions or conjunctions) or other units of the English language (i.e., prefixes). As a collection, the poems explore themes of absurdity and loss in the context of human relationships and how the loss of a "you" can drastically change the nature of the "I". What other images appear when one faces grief alone? What comes in to take the other's place? In many of the poems or poem sequences, the speaker's perspective shifts from preoccupation with the Other towards the strange, mythical, and, at times, delusional. Moving past the familiar "life is absurd," and "loss is difficult," *Oyster & Bear* rejects defeatism to ask what lies at the centre of our language and explores what it could be if it isn't, as some famously suggest, lack?

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DEDICATION

For Bjorn.

R.I.P.

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an eagle flew in the sun again but it didn't mean the same

i've seen loss bless you
i felt everything but envy

yet here you are at the edge of the sea
with nothing worth reporting

nothing to replace
your memories of the farm
the nervous thousand-palmed birches
the fortress your sister made of rocks

nothing will suffice
the sun sets on only a few trees
and the great grey owl flies headlessly onward

the days go by
and every vision
comes to nothing

you left the ocean behind
but the river could have led you
through the valley

it is bitter to sing in praise of the mind

the leaves on the pond
broke records that year

for turning the colour of fire
all at the same time

across the water children shrieked at seagulls
while the sun bore westward
across the sound

today you are a child too

sometimes when you see a bird
it is flying straight for your head

to the masters of our youth, greetings

the last days of a person's life are the same
as the first someone says at the party one mountain
will always stay hidden behind another

and the orange
unround moon

will light up a field
that knows nothing of your goings

meanwhile in your apartment
the zanzibar gem grows a new arm
and someone spills a drink

to take things seriously means to avoid

the idiotic glass
that fills or empties according to outlook

the stain on your shirt
your last coat of arms

means the same as the first

for i believed in the existence of a last door

1.

this is all that I have learned
god made us plain and simple
but we have made ourselves very complicated

2.

i have discovered only this
god made human beings for righteousness
but they seek out many alternatives

3.

see this alone i found
that god made man upright
but they have sought out many schemes

allow me, when i look, to marvel at you

above us the stars made pictures of our bodies
we couldn't understand you were looking
for affirmation i was looking

for a boulder flat enough to lie on

your father the morning he disappeared
ground the coffee beans as usual

the priest read from his book

prepare chains
the land is full of bloodshed
and the city full of violence

after the funeral you said you wanted to be buried
under white cloth be found by some women
and appear before your friends the next day
 altered
and calling for fish

in my dreams the thief fails to arrive

the dragon with its seven heads
turns them all away

the onions in the store refuse all comparisons, especially
to pearls

when the alley floods
the short walk from the corner store to our home
lengthens

inside the upright lamp makes a mockery
of the houseplants

and a spider escapes
its jar

you say that each moment it isn't open
the door becomes more closed

i say the light always hangs from a cord and the cord
is always connected

to a pillar of silver fire

the word revealed out of darkness was pear

someone has been writing
on your perfect menu

and your spirit has left you
for a stranger passing by your home

in the basement
i brew tea
and a list of rebuttals

a shadow hums in my window
as dusk la-tee-das
behind the mountain

the fruit was bold
to appear that way

and no one prepared
for the smaller wars

for i believed in the existence of waiting for laundry

4.

see this alone i found
god made human beings straightforward
but they searched for many complications

5.

i did learn one thing
we were completely honest when god created us
but now we have twisted minds

6.

see this alone I have found
that god made man upright and they--
they have sought out many devices

his death left no capital of the world, neither here nor
anywhere else

let us sail to greener waters

so we leave the rosebush behind
for the aphids to invent lace

when we set out
old leaves fall from the hull

see even the sea
has cloaked itself
in ash

on your broken evening of wet leaves

when the door opens and closes
i begin to understand rhythm

as indisputable as the night
bright with someone else's stars

where will you go now that you've finished with the farm?

in my dreams your horizon
does not emerge

in my dreams i am against you
and your streams

what end? you say

the keys and the door are still there
in the morning

i want to know where the house of an instant of seeing is

it was too hot to wear your sweater
but you'd already begun leaving

paused in a ring of hushed cows
a pasture past the shallow stream

what were you thinking?

it was always the hardest thing to imagine
not being eternal

for i believed in the existence of morning drinks

7.

see i have found only this
that god made men right
but they have found many sinful ways

8.

there is no other thing I have learned
god made people good
but they have found many ways to be bad

9.

but i did find this
god created people to be virtuous
but they have each turned to follow
their own downward path

ashes of inconceivable arts

when you broke a plate on the radiator
i knew it was time

somewhere is a man
wearing a belt of pure gold
standing in astroturf
surrounded by dragonflies
he can't see i said

the dragonflies are setting their cruciforms
in his hair
he's trying to tell you something

listen he's saying

who hasn't compared the night
to an alley?

i am no more than a secretary of the invisible thing

the world is sometimes with us
and it is

green blades fawning
round your beautiful white boots

presence makes what?
absence
absence

despite your invitations, it's hard

that fire this room
yes? who cares

have you always needed
someone to observe

sunday mornings
the multitude speaks

through the small dog
limping through the yard

it was not in parks that i learned humility

despite doom's declarations the grass
continues to grow

self-pity may be another form
of selfishness

but could you please play your accordion elsewhere?

to make up for your loss
i become you

the dust in certain ancient
unfound caves
is as unimaginable
as the black bones it hides

call for sulphur
and a flood and the wind
breaks the pond

no do not call the animals
or send a dove

do not send a raven
or sink to that mountain

thinking myself important by candlelight

how will i answer
the smaller flame
its crooked wick

i spend mercy
on whites and reds

can't look
past the glass though

i sometimes
set out the saucer

for the shapes of clouds
on certain nights

prophecies of my youth fulfilled but not in the way one
expected

a beast arrives in radiant colours
to walk among us

the looks were stern
in many sheep pens

you would be happy to know
the garden has been maintained

and either i always meant to leave
or never did

turn the sheep away
and i'll spend my life as a bear

again undone
and so full of shit

for i believed in the existence of underconfidence

10.

lo this only have i found
that god hath made man upright
but they have sought out many inventions

11.

behold this is the only [reason for it that] i have
found
god made man upright but they [men and women]
have sought out many devices [for evil]

12.

i have found only this
god made people decent
but they look for many ways
[to avoid being decent]

in valleys of beautiful, though poisoned, rivers

eyes closed i saw violas yellow road lines
the bellies of salmon

the single window
of your childhood bedroom
choked in insulation

you said the pines had raised their combs
against you a thousand
cocked silver eyes

for i believed in the existence of seventy-times-sevens

13.

only this i have found
that god made man right
and he hath entangled himself
with an infinity of questions

14.

one thing i have learned [found]
god made people good [virtuous upright]
but they have found all kinds of ways
to be bad [sought out many devices]

15.

i found this only
that god made a man rightful
[that god made man right]
and (then) he meddled himself
with questions without number

16.

(i found only this
that god made a person upright
or clear-headed
but then he mixed himself in/mixed himself up
with too many questions)

if i am sick, there is no proof whatsoever that man is a
healthy creature

the voice dies with the body
i cannot distinguish the meaning of this

so i come to believe
you were never real
always too much
with your goings

but a hundred dragonflies landed in my hair today

no one will believe this

my neighbour's misfortune pierces me and i begin to
comprehend

for a.t.

i too skipped the part
about the grave clothes
and saturday

and the bomb going off
forever

what i couldn't see my whole life
let me tell you now
a lamp has several sides

aha aha

you have been found wanting
no one can stand your assemblies
the deep says "you are not in me"
and the sea says "you are not with me"

but one day everyone will help you
peace will come as always
on the creaking wheels of some old fire

you've learned to not make idols of your bread
to dwell in darkness
like a heart or lung

you will search

though light bulbs will not bloom

and flames creep on the vine

the cassettes of the young knot

and the fields yield many paths

the flock is cut off from the fold

and no sound followed

our lack of reasons

i don't understand how to think about the dead

the valley's cracked palm
is unreadable no road

just white stones circling mud
and the hills darkening to a low burn

somewhere coyotes
reckon over bone

take two steps
the earth is a blank stare
you enter alone

she was cold, aware that she was nowhere

at the crossroads
take the good path
i will not walk in it

if i were to say go
be well fed and well
what use is it?

i forfeit my inheritance to the hound
chasing a white-tailed oracle
across the snow

it's a ghost's life
cutting flesh to the bone
dropping glass after glass
down the stairwell

watching coyotes pick off the cats

i am ready to accept
invisible gifts let me

drink mine
 and yours

what is it about this lamp
and exposure

where did i put my overflowing cup?

life has been easy
i am tipping your glass

to the feral dogs
and their mouthfuls of velvet

the wobbly splendor of the sea

friend you will find your island you will
dress as a monk and sing hymns
to invisible gods

do not look unkindly on yourself
you may not be granted passage

the pastures are already drying the mountains
rubble the world is a field of bones
that won't stand a trumpet sounding
out of earshot

take to the place you long for
that grove of burnt trees
and distant lightning

leave us to argue
about who loved you best

for over two thousand years i have been trying to
understand what it was

1.

what was it again? deep snow?
in the end what was it?
a river?

another edge left me
wooing anything that soothed

i've been found wanting
you have

only so many oceans to cross
though we count them
in drops

2.

a shoal of green reeds
always spelled escape
or sherry in the kitchen

where again the chairs are captive
to certain moods

again wonder
if i watered the dead
cactus too much or too little

3.

at the party
one drink away
from something novel

you or an unborn child
appear somewhere as a rabbit
gone to the mountain
paws in the deep...

what was it? yes
sad yes
should have skipped this

a flash and the fabric of the world is undone

on the sky the morning is red

are you sleeping? run

to the river

you're in love

look across the lit rooftops

an eye with the face of an eagle

a light in the abandoned house

and the mosquitoes

speed back and forth

small drums of lightning

i hope this will be counted somehow in my defense

on mornings like this gusts
play trees against my house

it's a racket

so i let the candle burn right through
the table and begin to speculate

spirits are always trying to find someone
to live through
from the afterlife

when they do i'll forget to sweep the house
and need to take a nap

perhaps you'll have found your island by then
and be eating pasta maybe
you'll have a companion
or some excellent books

i know long ago

i should have gone looking
but instead i spend years
calculating the use

submitted yet unsubmitted to unbending law

my whole life
i have not been wise

never can tell
if i lost all
or nothing at all

i left the kettle wailing
on the stove
until i burst into flame

but now that i'm older
i can accept the complaints
of that old lady
who used to live across the hall

100.

of this beyond all else I have satisfied myself
man's nature was simple enough when god made him
and these endless questions
are of his own devising

i was appalled by the vision; i kept it to myself

what is left unsaid
is an unbest beast

i'm not so easily confused

over the hill the trees catch fire

and again you let your mind enter
that singular bolt

my dear a thousand halls will not hold
the procession i've arranged for you

though i wandered out alone
though a lion stood upright
and walked like a man

your birthday is my birthday

i keep house casually

a bookshelf of blue paintings
and some empty picture frames

i ran out to the sound of your footsteps passing by my home
and returned but while i was gone
someone hid the whiskey

there were nights we walked to the water
but something ran ahead

turn your face the water dearest friend

from this angle
could be the ocean

*

here, gusts of wind; at my back, white clouds

my childhood was spent breaching rocks
set like backs of whales. my parents parted
from me strangely: a crow took my mother
and my father was lost in the sound
of a float plane bleating across the sky.

the trees taught my sisters and i
to carve light. we adopted the ferns
as our pets and spent long hours
brushing their hair.

at dusk we'd huck horseshoes in horseless places.
the scuffle of our feet forged a dark dugout
in the pit around the peg; imprints of small hands
collecting remains of the toss.

the oyster and bear were my only enemies:
one a blade, the other a lumbering daymare
i keep my eye on, watch it flashing
silver and cinnamon, hurtling
towards a lost space

between docks, the place
i'd learned to spell our names
forwards and forwards.

*

perched with the dead on a giddy carousel

if all of us had only thought of one another in the case of any tragedy that ever happened to anybody, anyone would be able to see that anything we could have done would have been more than useless.

both of us knew that each time we asked each other would you like either eggs or toast that everybody would have chosen toast. everyone knows eggs can't fix everything.

few knew that he had been over at her place, hers being more cheerful, full of symbols of herself which, without him, would to everyone else just be trinkets on the shelves however, besides himself, it seemed everyone in the room, meaning only she, preferred his company.

i think it is ludicrous how without him its value - the value of the trinket - is only in itself a figurine on some shelf.

she says, "few believe that many of the trinkets had been given me by my earlier friends. mine own had been more cumbersome, most of which i left in my old house much to my stepmother's dismay. myself, i consider her lucky."

"neither she nor no one has any right to impinge on nobody's time whether it be none or nothing," he says.

one could see that without one another, the others found the other side of the bed disagreeable. our routine had become "ours" until we left ourselves several months ago. then she came around or somebody did some weeks ago which made someone feel something unexpected.

that "theirs" had become "his" or "hers" several months ago ruined their memory of themselves. they saw them as these flies in their kitchens from which they could not rid either this pile of poached eggs or those burnt toasts.

us, we were what? well, whatever it was, which was something or nothing, whichever one felt at the time, it was now a broken trinket beside a bed. but who could tell whose trinket or whose bed? whoever spoke first would be the one to whom the most heartache would be added and whomever decided to listen would be one whose heart became toast remnants on porcelain.

you, well your assessment was good enough. keep you and "yours" and keep to yourself for the sake of maybe becoming "yourselves".

only the ridiculous is remembered by posterity

i was wandering an a-familiar path beside a pond in a park in the evening by my new apartment. i ad-walked over the small bridge overlooking the pond ante-it's-other-half. ab-your-company and anti-loneliness, i be-trailed the park, be-struck with its relative beauty in the midst of garbage - be-ridden with trees, squirrels, benches and such, all be-stilled by twilight on the pond. while co-finding a nice little spot under the bridge, i imagined meeting you to discuss the long drawn-out process of the contra-dereliction of the soul. "the only good dreams were had under the sound of coyotes' counterjoyous howls," you say. i am de-scented of those long days and gleefully fade my dia-annual memory of dis-mountaining sudden sadness, en-grieved with rain-embossed seasons and en-angered at your mentioning of them, extra-expectedly. hemi-willingly and hyper-apathetically, i hypo-endured an indurable conversation infra-bridge, inter-leaves (in intra-summer air at least), and non-speaking, ob-rupting what was sure to be an out-spill of over-confessed emotions. peri-navigating the situation, post-foreshadowing, pre-spiel-pro-guiling, i re-noted my routes of emergency exit. semi-sorrily, i sub-ducked the false gesticulating arm, syn-abling the propulsion of my feet trans-alcove, ultra-acrobatically, un-facing the deplorable conversation, the best of which was under-gone anyway.

with a flick of the wrist i fashioned an invisible rope,
and climbed it and it held me

I came aboard a plane as one about to embark on a snowbird migration. I came above a cloud-plain, across a desire to enter it - to go after the blurred blue - against my better judgment, along a flight path, I came a long way. I entered alongside other snowbirds stuffed in large cars amid broad roads, among broad buildings. I came anti-establishment. It was around Christmastime. I came as an estuary.

Astride two years, at 12:00 a.m., atop a concert hall in the deep south, according to custom but maybe a bit ahead of time, a kiss à la italiano, along with a request to dance, apart from everyone of course, but as for me, aside from a desire to join the other waltzers, as per tradition, as to the question, well I might as well as saying no, have backed away.

Everyone came bar Gershwin, and barring a miracle, I was the youngest one there. Before the band stopped playing, behind a curtain, below some gaudy chandeliers, beneath the plastic noise of noise-makers, beside a dropped flute, besides it being the appropriate occasion, wedged between waltzers, beyond six glasses of champagne but still "by Jove" awake enough to dance because of Gershwin, but for your sake, by means of a snack bar, I stalled.

'Circa 2012, concerning snow, considering the lack thereof and counting on it contrary to popular opinion and despite the impossibility of it coming down during a December evening in Florida in a gallery-cum-concert hall close to the ocean, I came outside to observe. Because depending on the state of the climate due to rumours of global warming, snow would not be possible tonight and except in extraordinary circumstances, would never happen, excepting that one incident on January 19th in 1977 when, excluding those who slept through the brief and early hour of snowfall, Floridians young and old (except for the too young and the too old), following each other to their front porches, came to gaze at the fragile powder landing on the bewildered palms, for the first time.

From inside the hall's courtyard, just forward of it, I saw a wild mangrove and figured I would move further towards it, given the fact that they were famous and that I'd come all this way, having gone south in a plane, (including a stopover in New York, in addition to a predicted missed flight in between New York and Fort Meyers in case of a storm and then in face of a storm, in favour of safety in front of said storm, in lieu of landing on time, in spite of the inconvenience, instead of taking a risk in view of the circumstances, because it was less than three hours to the next flight to Fort Lauderdale though it is not so near to Fort Meyers, notwithstanding the fact of my new arrival time being 1:00 a.m.), due to the hassle of my getting to this particular place, I felt compelled to enter the mangrove.

Into the stilt root jungle, cautious like an egret, minus the sure-footing, next to the Gulf of Mexico, near the heart of Vanderbilt beach, I went off the trodden path, on my own, onto the cypress knees, opposite the strangler figs, outside the brackish water, over the reindeer lichen, on account of a feeling of angst on behalf of having come too far on board a plane, on to this new terrain, on top of a root knot grown opposite to my understanding of root growth other than the poison ivy which grew in my yard in Canada which I discovered out of chance also happens to be an aerial root (and in fact is not really ivy) by means of an abandoned encyclopedia outside of a house that was destroyed owing to a hurricane.

Past the roseate spoonbills pending flight, one step per minute (plus a couple more), learning pro-creeping preparatory to my sudden panicked realization of alligators, prior to a more logical thought re:fear regarding the danger of alligators and the simple act of respecting their space, thinking of the rough beasts floating round the swamp regardless of my presence (and perhaps now due to my presence), save for the immersed and saving those that were sleeping, since they were nonetheless imminent, (at least psychologically), save for that tree I at once climbed, I would surely have perished.

Waiting in a tree being more than I could bear, I descended to inch back through the mangrove, throughout the hanging roots, till I came to the place touching moonlight where I was sure to find something noteworthy, toward the end of this expedition, towards a broken shaft in the overgrowth thanks to some miracle of nature (together with its natural proceedings), under the branch-womb, underneath the clear sky, a shaft of light unlike any place I'd known, until a great blue heron up the tree, of whom up until that point I had been unaware, upon encountering the bird up against all odds, (or at least having low odds up to the point when I decided to enter the mangrove), raised its wings versus the mangrove awning, and took flight via the slim crack in the overgrowth, its clear grey body vis-à-vis the swamp-murk, with such ease and skill, within such a tangled maze, was without, which was worth celebrating, with reference to modes of escape and with regard to the difficulty of rendering them graceful.

*

that chase with the hounds for the unattainable
meaning of the world

In the event that disaster strikes, if disaster is even what one would call it, and in case all forms of public transport stop, granted that the ground remain intact, then it is good that one would walk, provided that one has two working legs, or even just one, so long as the prosthetic other is sound, unless of course it breaks along the way, given that one does not have a spare, and that the fastening of the spare to the body would be simple enough, on the condition that one does not even need one (or two), and even if one does, well, for the purpose of walking when disaster strikes, one has no other option.

With this intention, I set out whenever I felt inclined so as to practice walking great distances, usually passing from the east side of Montreal to the west and back, sometimes over the mountain, sometimes crossing The Main at the mountain's east side. Since paranoia is conducive to poetics, owing to its derivative hyper-sensitivity, in the hope that such activity and experience of the senses would produce superior metaphors (while at the same time skeptical of this result due to the sound advice of my mother), I set out walking to the end that perhaps something noteworthy would be written during one such peripatetic hypothetical-disaster emergency drill with this (disaster) in mind. In other words, for fear that catastrophe could strike any moment and because of my mother's advice to "sois prête" inasmuch as one could be prepared (considering the element of surprise), in order to survive as best one could (given that of course disaster strikes). Since I had to consider all these things, in view of my own survival on the planet, while I did like walking and did not have a dog or some other creature to inspire the act, it took on a new imperative: lest we disaster.

In other words, walking became a common pastime for me and my twin who, as a dog raises its hair, also felt the prickling of disaster. Walking in Montreal was loved by everybody, including myself and my twin. For one thing, certain streets are brimming with people who, like us, enjoy walking in particular, whether they are sound or not. As an illustration, one night we (my twin and I and our sister) were walking up Sainte-Catherine (east to be sure), when a young man came up to examine my sister's bicycle in detail. In this case, the case of the young man, something was not quite right, or sound - namely, he kept asking the price of the bicycle of our sister when indeed the bicycle was not for sale. My sister, to demonstrate the bicycle was not for sale, kept pointing to herself saying "c'est la mienne" and for this reason we thought for certain the young man would understand, chiefly through the relaying of the message through plain speech (that being: "it's mine"), and would not need the superfluous gesticulation to emphasize the simple fact that the bicycle was not for sale. The act of my sister making energetic motions with her limbs was merely to put it another way. Truly, for him to repeat the question "c'est combien?" (that is to say, "how much for your bicycle?") was disheartening. To clarify that it was not for sale, with attention to his current derangement, was useless. To explain the bicycle was not for sale to a small dog or an orange cone by all means seemed to make just as much sense. Surely, to enumerate the quantity of refusals to sell the bicycle would be boring for "tout le monde."

The bicycle was markedly whimsical, sporting features such as a weave of fake plastic flowers in its basket and a coat of rosy spray paint. Another key point is that perhaps the sinister looks of myself and my twin, especially in our bedraggled patchy coats and with our greasy mongrel hair, was an indication to the passerby that the bicycle was, for example, stolen, though the first thing to remember is that my twin was merely holding the bicycle, specifically so that our sister could don her mitts, and that she in her bold pink helmet which stood out because of its deviation from the ordinary (as if determined by caprice, for instance) should have been the most compelling evidence to indicate that the bicycle did belong to her and was not, in fact, "hot." On nights such as these in the city of Montreal, especially on the west side of Sainte-Catherine heading east, it is surprisingly difficult to avoid unsound townsfolk and a point often overlooked is that there are frequently more unsound than sound townsfolk on any given night. With this in mind, on the positive side, the whole situation was "pas grave."

The act of disembarking on the streets of Montreal, especially Sainte-Catherine, generally speaking, can be unpredictable and, all things considered, in the final analysis, in case of a disaster or merely a stroll, as shown above, anything can happen, even bewildering conversations, and in the long run, it may be better to deny the peripatetic impulse and stay inside since (a) a sudden event, such as an accident or natural catastrophe that causes great damage or loss of life and other such unfortunate consequences, could strike at any moment and in any magnitude perhaps (b) involving one or multiple disasters¹ and (c) these could happen with such abruptness and surprise that (d) walking would become unnecessary or (e) useless. Given these points, (f) walking, as it has been noted, and (g) the reasons to learn it (given that one does not have a dog), could (h) in a word be (i) "futile," but for the most part, (j) walking (especially with a twin) had become, (k) after all things considered, (l) quite enjoyable and, in fact, (m) to learn to walk long distances at a time (in a go), (n) in summary, was (o) not only important to (p) train oneself to survive certain disasters, (q) improve one's health and (r) conducive to writing something notable, but also (s) enjoyable. In conclusion: (t-z) these considerations alone were enough to outweigh the possibilities of risk, discomfort and such.

¹ ...including but not limited to floods, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes, tsunamis, avalanches, limnic eruptions, landslides, hurricanes, cyclones, mud flows, ash clouds, blizzards, drought, wild fires, hailstorms, lava flows, heat waves, tornadoes, lightning, bush fires, epidemics, flus, SARS, AIDS, H1N1, XDR TB, malaria, solar flares, gamma-ray bursts, ice slides, famines, plagues, tuberculosis, typhoons, and torrential rains.

As a result, since the sun had suddenly rebegun to shine (despite having little to no effect on the temperature, which remained, dismayingly, cold), and even in proximity to the upcoming calamity, being sunny and still predisaster, the day was perfect to set out on the Longest Walk and, under these circumstances, I phoned my twin who agreed to meet me on Rue Saint-Denis between Rue Cherrier and Avenue Laurier and we donned our sunglasses and winter coats and for this reason completely missed one another and henceforth decided not to wear sunglasses at the same time. Thus the planned portion of the walk was postponed and, because la journée was not quite young, the Longest Walk became shorter, though indeed we had been moving or travelling at a regular, slow pace by lifting and setting down each foot in turn the whole time, stopping and turning, then backtracking, until we found each other, but certainly the proposed route and our embarking upon it was delayed. Hence, once we'd found each other, the Longest Walk began, for we decided to ascend the mountain as, consequently, so did many others (including four horses and more than four dogs), and therefore the climb (which could hardly be called a climb though the lingering ice did make it difficult) to which we thereupon turned was commenced forthwith, and we turned accordingly off Rue Saint-Denis, down Avenue du Mont-Royal toward Parc du Mont-Royal.

An hour later, although we were for the most part absorbed in conversation as we passed the walkers, joggers, runners, idlers, horseback-riders and cross-country skiers, along with their animals if they had them, we spotted a dog who, instead of walking as normal dogs do, galloped like a pony. I declared that this must be because it is "si heureux," and hardly had the words exited my mouth, than my twin responded that in fact it could be that the dog were injured, which then would render him "not a happy dog." "How cruel," I exclaimed, "for its owner to gallop it up the mountain if it is injured, in case that its injury worsen or even bother it." "Yes," my twin replied, "but there are many sad dogs." This was said in order that I might gain some perspective, and truly to be sad for the sake of this small dog seemed unproductive, though indeed, at the time, it made me feel worse to ponder all the dogs that were somewhere unfortunately and regrettably characterized by sorrow and regret. "To put it differently," my twin said, "provided that this one dog causes so much grief in you, is it not only fair to think of all the other dogs who might be injured or somehow sorrowful and therefore alleviate your singular sadness?" I replied, "Now that this one has come to my attention, I find it does more good to sympathize with the single sad dog, once seen, rather than exhaust or dilute one's emotions thinking of all the other sad dogs that may or may not exist on this planet. Besides, there is still a possibility that this sad dog ahead of us might be a happy dog." "Rather than argue," my twin said, "since we always come to the same conclusions, why don't we ascend to the Kondiaronk Belvedere? I brought apples since I knew you would be hungry."

So that we would cease in our argument, I conceded to ascend to the Kondiaronk Belvedere. The belvedere was higher than we imagined and by the time we reached the top, I was feeling sufficiently sore. Though walking had long been a pastime of mine, the nagging pain I now experienced on the Kondiaronk Belvedere caused me to question the sense of walking in a city, especially up a hill, or worse, down a hill, with the knowledge that such walks would cause me pain. A part of me was tempted to consider this question, whereas my other part (to whom I listened more frequently) knew that it is important to walk, whether in pain or no, to avoid the certain disaster, which, it is argued, is inevitable. Head aloft, I considered such complex things until a free-range child, who bounded vigorously into view, jumped upon a loose tile of cement in front of me and lost balance, falling and scraping his left side. This happened despite there being several orange cones, the reason for whose presence was ambiguous, which is why, in my opinion, the child is owed much compensation from whoever is responsible for the looseness of those thin slabs of concrete (supposedly shaped according to the purpose for which they were required) and the unsatisfactory placement of several orange cones.

Although this may be true, the orange cone incident did not fully detract from the matter whose truthfulness, in contrast, was ambiguous as it depended on the right judgment of the current emotional state of a small animal. Of course I am referring to the happy dog/sad dog philosophical impasse, but how to come back to such matters after a small and concrete disaster had just taken place before our very eyes? On the other hand, the tumble could give the discussion new force, as upon observing the rolling about on the ground of the child by the cones one must ask oneself if one sympathizes with this particular child, all children who have ever fallen over loose tiles amid orange cones, or with all of the children who indeed are suffering and have suffered not just tumbles upon belvederes but much more grievous tribulations. At the same time, I had the inkling that in spite of this dog and this child and their consequent joy or sadness—whether imaginary or no—the real question ever so elaborately masked was whether or not one's habit, dare I say one's "désir," was to embody the sadness of the sad dog.

Be that as it may, I kept the question from my twin. Then again, I may have uttered something, since, above all, the conversation put its tail between its legs. But the mountain air was very nice. After all, we had come this far on an injury that I had thought nothing of fixing but for the prompting of my twin, indeed that I had not even noticed until we had breached the dangerous structure erected on the pleasure ground of Mont-Royal for the purpose of viewing the surrounding scene. Thus ended La Grande Promenade, with a descent down the south side of the mountain toward a small restaurant on Avenue Lincoln for Chinese dumplings. Still, days later, when the time came to see the medic, an action that contradicted my usual impulse to deny any such problems that may (and often do) at a later date prove detrimental, she told me that to walk or to run is henceforth forbidden (yet short distances are OK) as long as I, between appointments, perform various exercises to increase the strength of the conjunctions of certain bones that, albeit healthy, are weak and misused. Besides, she said, you took too long to see me.

Although my pattern had been to focus on the greater and more foreboding disaster at hand, my attention instead, thanks to the hounding of my twin and the sound advice of a medic, had been brought to a tiny conjunction of bone on my lower right side. Whereas earlier I had been imagining the necessity of walking great distances for survival on streets as various and far between as the west end of Rue Sainte-Catherine and the north end of Rue Saint-Denis, despite myself, my very body had rendered the vision unimaginable until I conversely stopped my peripatetic practice and otherwise tended to the simple motion of lifting and lowering my right leg off the floor in one spot. However, her halting proclamation would not stop disaster from happening when it so chose, and rather than its timing being even slightly convenient, disaster struck nevertheless, regardless of my "insuffisance" and notwithstanding the above-outlined "road to recovery."

In the first place, the disaster was not only unexpected but it also happened on such a subliminal scale that, in fact, most everyone failed to notice that it had occurred at all. For sure, disasters in like manner take place all over the map, in addition to all over other maps, and are coupled with comparable results: other folks, in the same way, are forced from their homes first from "l'insomnie," second from a desire to leave the disaster's aftermath, and third, out of simply not knowing what else one could possibly do in the light of unsaid circumstances, not to mention all of this under a general blanket of lethargy. To say nothing of the others affected by similar disasters whose trauma is equally important, they, by the same token, were difficult to imagine -- nearly impossible -- by both myself and my twin who, again, advised me to fetch help, but the disaster having been so subliminal, to tell anyone who may be living in perfect happiness from lack of knowledge, seemed unnecessary and again, we set to walking-parkward toward Lafontaine.

Also in Parc Lafontaine were several owners and their dogs who then did not make note of the look of disaster which equally tainted my face and manner of walking or stepping and identically affected my twin. Uniquely, we dragged through the park like dogless leashes pulled by some master who too had begun to question what in fact had brought him to this park and moreover, how such sad strings happened to trail his progress in the corner of an April morning in the Plateau. My twin as well as myself together with our memory of the disaster took up most of an hour despairing that there was nowhere to go from here. Likewise, the paths in the park slowly trailed to a close as infinite ellipses across the hour of six a.m. Comparatively, the disaster was perhaps predictable and correspondingly the embarrassment of getting caught within it was similarly predictable. Furthermore, our walk crushingly continued; additionally, l'ennui.

In the middle of the park (or to the left or right, depending on where you stand) in front of a stone pavilion, being on this side of it and my twin being in the distance (only appearing here and there while I lifted my gaze from the foreground to where my twin was in the background) and what with my twin's geographical position in the park not being central in my mind, while adjacent to the pavilion opposite to my twin, je l'ai perdue. Here was the pavilion and there its other side but next to its other side at the angle from which I now looked -- having gone over to the other side--near the place I assumed my twin to be, my twin was not. I spotted a bridge I had not seen before above the pond and, below it, some loose rock down which one could easily scramble. I approached it and looked under between the loose rock and the underside of the bridge and scrambled down further to see if beyond the arch of the bridge (which was the shore nearby) was perhaps wherever my twin had taken off to. It was around seven a.m. at this point, before many people besides the dog walkers were up, and hence every creature in the park seemed to walk alongside another living or animate being amid the trees that were just beginning to sprout beneath the nerve-wracking false starts of spring. Beside me, on either side, no one. I looked behind once more before I walked across the bridge.

At present, there was not enough distraction not to think of my twin from time to time and my twin's life which I knew must sooner or later exist as one apart from mine. At the same time, up to the present I had perhaps overestimated the nature of our friendship. To begin with, would I have been so quick to disappear? In due time, I'm sure, but until now I had not considered the flightiness of even my own disposition post-disaster. As soon as I considered this, I felt relief that, in the meantime, I would never have to worry about suffering the negative consequences of being responsible for taking off in a moment and without delay. My twin's allegiance to me was, in the first place, sudden, and at this instant did I not wonder, after my twin's disappearance, that I should have predicted such an overzealous attachment would later lead to an overzealous abandonment. Was I the sad dog at last? Until our series of statements or reasons intended to establish either a happy dog or sad dog disposition (and, hence, to refute the opposite) on the Kondiaronk Belvedere, I had not considered that such a point of view would since implicate even me into the categories previously outlined and, placing my singular suffering in the context of a thousand twin sufferers, I shamed myself that, before this, I had not considered what was perhaps "dans les cartes."

Hence, I forthwith continued my wander since there was no object in looking for someone when that someone chooses not to be found, and to look once around the pavilion and under the bridge was more than enough. I straightaway went about leaving the park not knowing where next to go but meanwhile facing the terrible resolve to, henceforth, go alone. Whenever I encounter terrible firmness or steadfastness of purpose, determination, or an instance of this, I eventually drive myself into such a pit of "doute de soi" that the walk and the motion of going further into both the physical and psychological unknown during an aftermath of a disaster (which first leashed me to an uncertain fate, and second lost my twin just in time to instigate confusion prior to my revelation that perhaps it was not some uncertain fate) are rendered meaningless.

Either my twin left willingly or not. As soon as these thoughts settled, just as I breached the muddy edge of the park onto Rue Rachel, I regretted my disdain, which was both petty and unjustified. Well, neither possibility could solve the dilemma nor restore back to me my twin who had not only vanished but left no trace. Not only was I now alone but because of this state or quality of being solitary, I decided it was best to begin to forget. Immediately, quickly, finally, I denied what thoughts I had of my twin to release myself from the ghost of my twin (who formerly existed and suddenly disappeared) and shortly I discovered that all thoughts of this past twin could not instantly evaporate and I presently gave up, trying instead to render my thinking of my twin at all as "comme ci, comme ça" at best. For if my walk continued and my twin did not return, I could remove neither my twin's memory from the routes we travelled together nor the memories of conversations triggered by certain landmarks along said routes but rather would have to suffer being hounded by the aforementioned memories or else stop walking completely yet the prospect of someone having the power to render another legless due to the complex and multiple conjunctions of conversation, thought, memory, history, geography, anatomy, incident and disaster that occur during what seems a simple physical movement one foot at a time from one place to another was too outrageous to bear despite its accuracy. One either walks or one doesn't. Happy ... sad? Alas, the same dog.

In short, when my twin did reappear in brief three days later near the pavilion in Parc Lafontaine, my twin had so changed in countenance that to summarize the differences here would be impossible. To put the two on balance would put the balancer in such a state of shock that he or she would altogether not believe that my twin and my twin's new countenance were overall that of the same twin. Ordinarily, disasters do not result in such transfigurations and usually the willfully disappeared do not return so conspicuously. By and large we found the whole thing frankly ridiculous and to sum up our opinion on the matter of walks, disasters, dogs and the like, we, on the whole, are beginning to think a piece of writing or an oral composition about said things in which the expression of feelings or ideas is typically given intensity and flavour by distinctive diction, rhythm, imagery, etc., would be a faux pas. In any event, it is hard enough for us to adjust to my twin's new countenance -- in either case! -- either as the one inhabiting the new skin or the other ogling. The discomfort of recording it would not be worth the risk to our already fragile state of mind, and, to be frank, the probability of anyone believing in a person's sudden transfiguration under the context of having simply decided to go for a walk (which is both conducive to [a] avoiding disaster and [b] strengthening one's anatomy) is, in the end, absurd.

NOTES

Many of the titles in this manuscript are borrowed lines from Czeslaw Milosz poems and can all be found in *Czeslaw Milosz: Selected and Last Poems 1931-2004* (New York: Ecco, 2006).

These poems include many Biblical references, especially from the Books of the Prophets.

The list poem that starts with the title "for i believed in the existence of a last door" is made up of various translations of Ecclesiastes 7:29.

The first line of "your birthday is my birthday" is a reference to Kobayashi Issa.

"here, gusts of wind; at my back, white clouds" appeared in an earlier version in *Bodega* magazine, under the title "Autobiography."

"perched with the dead on a giddy carousel" is structured on an excessive use of English pronouns.

"only the ridiculous is remembered by posterity" is structured on the misuse of prefixes.

"with a flick of my wrist, i fashioned an invisible rope, and climbed it and it held me" uses 150 English prepositions.

"that chase with the hounds for the unattainable meaning of the world" is structured on the use of English conjunctions and transitional phrases. Excluding the first page, all pages include (a) a reference to a street or landmark in Montreal, (b) a reference to a dog or dog-like feature, and (c) an embedded Oxford English Dictionary definition. An earlier version of this poem was published as a chapbook with Proper Tales Press in November 2013 under the title, *Happy Dog, Sad Dog*.

Many of the poems in the first section of the manuscript are to be published in a forthcoming chapbook with Baseline Press under the title, *Love The Sacred Raisins Cakes*.