

# The Certainty Dream

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English

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## ABSTRACT

### The Certainty Dream

Kate Hall

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.

DREAM IN WHICH THE DREAM IS SCALED TO SIZE

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.

VARIATION ON A THEME BY LYN HEJINIAN

*In the gap between what one wants to say (or what one perceives there is to say) and what one can say (what is sayable), words provide for a collaboration and desertion.*

*Lyn Hejinian*

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 scabbled 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.

## QUICK TOUR OF THE CATHEDRAL

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.

## WATCHING A LEAF FALL I CANNOT SEE

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.

MYNAH SPEAKS

this conversation holds 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

## AS THOUGH SEALED IN A GLASS JAR

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 fail 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  
caught 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)

I

*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.

## II

*Clothespin, 1976*

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

### III

#### *Bicyclette Ensevelie (Buried Bicycle), 1990*

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.

(c)

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 ) *Disucssion*

(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.

(b)

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.

## STORY TO CRANBERRIES

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 any one'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

## WHAT WE CAN'T SAY IS ROUND BUT HAS NO DIAMETER

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  
coastguard 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.

## ONLY IN SHORT SENTENCES

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.

UPON WAKING, THESE POEMS DO NOT STAND UP

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.

## THE SUN LIBRARY

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

## ANTELOPE 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 pigsty 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  
awaking 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