Another Cosmos

*By T. L. Murphy*

*There are only varied questions*

*of different shades, and*

*no appropriate answer.*

*Satish Verma*

Raven

**Invisible**

I have taken a vow of silence

from the hairless dark

and a vow of celibacy

from my stone room.

No shoes

No bed

No food or water

No fire

I will pray to no one

and offer the earth

what is left of my dry bones

after the crows have had their fill.

Dirt and less that dirt.

Dust in an eyeless skull.

I am what’s left

after ghosts

move on

to their graves -

the face that no one remembers

the hollow man in the drifting crowd

the empty hat

the unplayed note

the missing letter

the thin shadow that finally

turns from the sun.

**The View from the Kitchen**

Smoke from the thousand fires

paints a noon sky.

Mountains run like blood

knife-edges gasping.

Ravens hold the air, drive

songbirds from the trees.

In the closing dust, I hear

great drills turning.

Wolves run the streets with

rabbits in their teeth.

A horned owl

shadows the sun.

Meet me by the river, daughter.

You don’t need to bring anything.

**Mouth of Rags**

How do I count hunger?

Darkness?

What are the degrees

of corruption?

Numbers lie scattered

in my shallow grave

and across my naked fields.

Grass is all I know.

Grass completes me.

**Down the Hemlock**

Never one to sleep

he took his coffee cold

and his grave hot.

The axioms for perfection

were crude and imprecise.

He found paradise lacking.

No bones left unbroken

no vows honored

and the killing tree bloomed.

He retired to the desert followed by

a conspiracy of ravens

just before the snow.

**Poems for the Revolution**

He titled his poems for the revolution

regardless of what the critics said

starving all the colours in the first line

killing off the heroes in the second

dropped the fire-kill on the third

and opened all the dams.

Choked out sentiment with his skinless hands.

Ground attachment under his orphaned foot.

By the time he reached the second stanza

there were no readers left standing.

So he wrote for the axioms and planets

not yet discovered

punctuating his words with smells

of primordial soup. And at the end

he signed his true name from under

the wreckage of protocol

with the rat-a-tat flourish

of a homeless scarecrow.

**Barefoot and Blissful**

When stealing shoes

from the dead, a perfect

fit is not necessary.

As long as you can cross

the desert without blisters

or snake bites.

My current boots fit like

bags of flour, not

handshakes

so I am always looking

for a new pair but the

dead have been wily lately

putting locks on their feet

and complex codes in the hope

someone will bring them back.

I can't see it. But being dead

isn't what it used to be.

Sometimes you can't even tell.

Last week I asked a guy if he was

dead or alive. He had shoes

about my size.

"None of your

damn business!"

he said.

**Disciples of Gaia**

Window shopping

for a new god

takes you through streets

of ancient empires.

They line up like

disciples of Gaia

sporting the new

superpower.

Red lights flash

all night

and the homeless

crawl from window to window

seeking handouts and perhaps

a kingdom to rise

to warrior status

and spread their seed

over the subjugated

body of infidel.

Nightly

I watch the stars

and speak to them like brothers.

But not one has ever talked back.

**Stop Sign on the Road to Glory**

We gather at the four-way stop

where all roads lead

to a flat horizon.

Elders speak in solemn tones

and the children fidget.

You and I divert our eyes

afraid to acknowledge the

full meaning of this encounter

which is not about remembering

but about embracing even though

the awkwardness of our

inconvenient skin stands

between us like an ocean

as you weep into the red earth

and I push my fingers through

my phantom hair.

**Dimensional Angst**

Where line meets corner

here is the parting

for the shape of space.

Clouds lose their bearing

when the rain

puts away its dice.

Already, the smoke.

Apocalypse rising

like a bird of prey.

You hang in the sun

by a rocky ledge. Shake

the claustrophobic buzz.

A betrayal of moon

unthinkable.

**First Poem of the Day**

How quickly perspective changes.

I have opened all the windows

for the smoke of the

lemongrass.

Sirens roar through its sweetness

but I no longer listen.

The sky takes on

a fatherly gaze.

The dead have tucked

time into,

their back pockets

handing it out in small,

color-coded pieces with

great discretion.

High on the ledges

a white goat traverses

snow-bound cliffs.

**Night Vision**

He was last seen hovering

over a former image of himself

listing slightly, casting

dark and indecipherable

incantations

while down the street

a resident pack of hyenas

laughed over a righteous kill

their nocturnal eyes

searching the tall grass.

And without a soul to witness

the bullet train sped through town

hardly touching the tracks.

The only sound

was splitting air.

**The Fault**

The smallest hole

lets the ocean into

your childhood where

you drown a thousand times

under crashing waves.

The pebble in your shoe

makes you limp.

The tone of the wind

brings a storm.

The stare of the horseman

tells his crime.

You wear ruin’s rags

like a winter coat

and never take it off

even when the sun returns.

But you are always warm.

The past lies under

a tomb city.

The future rides

with pinstriped puppeteers.

Today you will lynch

the gardener's daughter.

**Fear of Crowds**

Distance is a blade of grass

and a night sky.

No here or there to mark

no sense of place.

Just wind where your concerns

fit inside one pocket -

a pocket with a hole

through which you slip

not you anymore

and so much space, time is a tin whistle.

The crowd you once feared

never happened.

That death you carry

dissolved to dust.

**No Lyrics Left**

Its easy to see that no one

wants advice

even when they ask for it.

The guy next door

rakes his leaves into the wind.

When I explain to you

the life of particles

you text the moon.

These things are of no consequence

in the circle of forgetting.

When you wake from

your long dream call me.

If I'm no longer alive

I'll leave you a detailed message

with instructions on how to get to the next world.

That's where you'll find me

sitting in the sun

drinking strong tea.

**Interview with Death**

When I showed you the stacked evidence

held up by the blood of my breath

you laughed and turned your guns on the village

preferring slaughter to truth.

This, you said, was the only reality, knowing

that we all die, and truth, a mere distraction.

Dealing out death in great numbers, you said,

made your own death more tolerable.

And when I showed you that death

is beautiful in itself and not the opposite of life

you drew your sword and pierced my heart, saying,

your truth is irrelevant now.

And you saw yourself dying again

but found no beauty in it, still.

**Blue God**

My blue god stopped breathing

and the eyes rolled back in his head.

In death he had the look

of a man for once

almost someone you could imagine

someone you could have a drink with

and talk about how short life is

and how long death hangs around

not that you'd be complaining

not that it would do you any good

as god choked on his

Holy olive.

**My Tiny Room**

Each morning I write to my sister

to describe the music I've heard, open

her violin case and place

the letter gently

under the strings.

In the evening

I write in the sand to my father

to tell him what I’ve learned.

At night, the tide

takes the message to him.

But you, my friend,

you

I write when the sun is strong

in the words

of a new alphabet.

For now, I keep these letters

under the floor of my tiny room.

**No Names**

Like me, you bear the mark of Icarus.

I’ve seen your face in the silver

eyes that shine from the mud.

In such fields of scattered feathers

my music dies.

Within this circle, we don’t

wear colours, we don’t

ask questions. We play the black keys.

We don’t sleep. We don’t

touch the stones.

If you want to dine of flame tonight

meet me in the green zone

beyond the silken hills.

Leave your hounds at home

and take your shoes of at the gate

to walk the strewn grass.

All the kinds of silence grow here.

You forget your footsteps

when you enter barefoot.

They won’t be heard*.* You come

to climb the empty stairs

into the night sky.

**Passing into Spring with Zeno's Paradox**

All the anger poems

starting at zero

add up like half the distance to one

and never catch the tortoise.

You begin to wonder

what the point is, locking

horns with the devil

beating yourself for blood

while the tortoise

plods across the finish line

and you’ve destroyed yourself

to stay one step behind.

Yesterday, all the snow melted.

Run-off came early this year.

I returned the cheque of one dollar

for my first poem.

The river is happy.

The creeks are laughing.

You would not last a minute

in the cold water.

**Stone**

**A Painting**

White mist

touches footprints

in the sand.

Same deep water everywhere

same sun

same moon

No one can say

why anything

happens at all.

**Catch the Moon**

*after “Keeping Things Whole” by Mark Strand*

Standing in a field,

I am the field

while every sky

reaches down. The wind

chatters in the grass.

Rain falls up from the earth.

I hear you talking

in the constant lightning.

The hills wait patiently

for an answer and I

am still waiting for their question.

As a child, I ran

through this field until the clothes

fell from my body

and ever since

I have stood here naked.

**The Copper Pool**

Still

I hear your loons

calling from the mist.

They come close

dive and break the glass

rise over there.

The ripple crosses the world

strips deserts bare of sand.

Your eyes bleed under the lids

see me standing in the dead trees.

When I opened the book of angels

birds fly from their cages.

Torn feathers lie in my hands

like a memory that

guides me through the mountain.

You could sleep in the arc of their wings.

While the southern sun

burns in your desire

and your knowing returns

to the copper pool

to speak the world’s newest word.

**Teardrop Earrings**

In still water, your reflection

darkens with the rising sun.

Flowers open for epiphany.

Meanwhile, the wind

circles in a heart of doves

pricks the swollen tongue

of the child

raised by wolves

you know the one

lost under a scorching moon

she grew nocturnal eyes and ran

down the night.

When you drink from her face

she drinks from yours

and the bottomless lake

drains into the bottomless sea.

There is no cure

for this flight of tears.

No shelter from the earthquakes

of your damaged soul.

**Suck the Moon**

Lately, the moon has been

trying to usurp the sun

rising in her own halo of daylight

casting fire across the heavens.

She sends chariots

deep into wet caves of her forgotten grottos.

She sets with bursting prism

reverses the order of spectrum

scatters clouds, raises the wind, as if new paradigms

had landed on the unsuspecting earth.

It is all we can do to remember the sun, but then

as sure as death

her vigor fades to dark and loss and she

is swallowed by the night.

**Blood Spilled on My Book**

The beast rises from the river

as I stand on the bank

taking note.

Threshers drag the fields in my sleep

leave worms

to slither for cover.

Ordinary words and only a few

have been banned but none

sharp enough to kill.

What was it in particular

that made you

want to wipe out carbon

and rewrite the future

by sending your assassins

into the past?

**List of Stones**

The old mason has gone

fishing in his paper boat

and throws back all the fish

as he rows inside the moon.

In the garden, flowers

bloom upside down

searching for the midnight sun

squeezing blood from the air.

This morning I recall your dream

of horses running

into the guns. I saw the fear in your

metamorphic eyes.

The postman refuses

to deliver the mail

pointing to his contract where it says

"No more mountains."

No matter how many stones

I carry from the field

they keep rising, like heavy

ants to serve their queen.

Your hands swell until the salt

seeps from your pores

and dries on the ground

in sedimentary escarpments.

**Orange Butterflies**

Dust clouds beyond

my vision block the sun.

Their machines

shake the earth.

I’m standing on the pyre

in the middle of a

mud desert.

Blank headstones stretch to horizons

each, an illegal kill.

The butterflies are unaware

of the flame they carry.

I’m trying to understand my odds.

This was not the agreement

I made. I saw

the blue/green

snake eyes

but never saw the black

sneaking up from slaughtered

faith where my god

lay in agony.

**White Widow**

Femme fatale with a black

hour glass

escaped the congenial sniper.

She knows your secret name

and where you sleep.

Dawn finds her

tucked in the folds of your

satin sheets

her sands draining in their own

dimensions.

Hard to tell the dream

from reality when you

hear the heavy breathing.

Someone phoned you

from the mountain top.

**Stone Bowl**

The roaring gushes from a narrow

tunnel

floored with round pebbles.

The walls, smoothed of

round ice

left all the leaves broken.

Her open mouth screams

deep in the stone bowl

where life begins.

Your face bears the cargo

of regret when you turn

from the shadows.

What question can I ask you

just to feel the sun

on my skin again?

**Red Shoes**

For days we ran with the dead

barefoot and nearly naked

in short grass on banks

where a river bled.

You had left your red shoes

at the mouth where the bay wept

and I had left my voice

in the stone well.

The living lined the parapets

in their dreams. Worried

we would not return.

They beat the skin drums.

But the dead

had no such concerns

sang no songs

beat no drums

only ran

in peripheral darkness

and for a short time

we forgot the cargo of living.

The dead left us at the Bay of Tears.

You put on your red shoes

and I heard myself

speak again.

**Waiting**

The word sleeps

in a field of snow

waiting for the rain.

You are the shadow I see

behind my eyes, your arms

extended as a night bird.

Tonight we stand

in the tall grass

and watch the sky.

In the morning I will tell you

my dream. It comes from the cave

under the mountain

where you bathed in cool waters

and the light of the earth

held you like a baby.

**The Stone of the Mountain**

And I went with Grandfather

to the mountain.

We were the same age

but he was older.

He said the machines had damaged me

and he picked up the stone of the mountain

gave it to me saying I was

to carry it to the river where I would cast it in.

We did this

and the river thanked me.

He built a fire and showed me the blue

light in the flame.

We stayed by the fire all night until

I became a man and he became a boy.

**Blow the Bridge**

Now we stand on

ravaged abutments

and offer sacrifice

to gods we invented on the other side

to justify our madness

and forgive war crimes

in the war against ourselves.

We blew the bridge

when we walked across

and the stones fell in the river.

What comfort is forgiveness from illusion?

I cannot accept

faith weapons

or flesh bridges.

Long shadows

blanket the drumming

ghost army.

**The Mission**

The mission was aborted

once we discovered the lost city.

In the rain forest of our hope

monkeys swung through the trees.

You turned to me with your

good eye, silent as stone.

There was nothing left to say. You had dragged

your bad leg all the way from the sea

and dug a trench already

filled with regret.

**The Saint of Fugitives**

You sacrificed yourself

for the runaways. Took the heat

of their nightmares

and made bread

sewed winter coats

from their rags of solitude

and gave them family trees

and siblings in the wind.

At the fire barrel

you told the heroic tales

of character and courage

even as your spine crumbled.

We buried you in the pauper's

grave without a headstone

just a sprig of tumbleweed

that turned to dust in the fall.

The young ones still speak your name

and cross themselves when

they place their bread on the

cardboard altars.

**Hi Velocity**

To walk the thin line

to free fall

to feather the edge.

Lost in thought at

light speed

where doubt dogs standing stones.

Even fear drops away

unaccustomed to thin air.

You are alone in your own danger

and then

someone passes you

eating an apple.

**Inward Spiral**

Whispers in the shadow of stones

go unheard

in the hot sun. You

go about counting all the

important breaths and years

getting smaller by the day.

A cold wind

stops your heart and you forget

how to start it again.

Gravity has pulled your liver

into your hips. You realize

you've been walking on your knees.

Somehow, the rooms you live in

have become the same colour

same furniture.

Suddenly

it seems you may not

make it to death.

**Reading Your Poem**

I found your poem

dying in the arms of a stone tree.

I knew it was yours by the way

the tree caressed your face

and the stone wept salt

that piled on the ground in a cone

like the bottom of an hour glass.

I had seen this cone before

under melting hearts

and heard these words in whispers

at the turn of night to day and day

to years. You must have waited

a long time, chiselling each letter

as your hands got smaller.

When I woke from the long

dream and learned to breathe again

the ground had forgotten

the look of my feet.

A red moon in a cloudless sky

shone brighter than the dwarf sun.

Boats sat empty on the sand

by a motionless sea.

I’m sorry I wasn’t there

and now the world seems

bare of souls and the tired wind

finally resting.

Did you ever find an answer?

**Forces of the Day**

I see

children on the corner

in the rain

under hoods

taking swipes

with their scythes

at foam-dark clouds

and the clock grins.

This poem cannot go on

my grass thinned to ribbons,

my walls to paper.

Where do I stack

my chain-link bones?

**Skulls**

We walked in wide digressions

and rearranged the furniture to avoid

close scrutiny by any of the scattered skulls.

Even swept the floor in crop circles

and knotted our words with talisman's

and strange gargoyles.

The children used them for footballs

explaining their long names which we denied

and sent them to bed hungry.

We invented loud distractions to drown

their voices, and pyrotechnic drugs

to ban them from our dreams.

But in the firelight

the sockets glow, no matter

how much money we burn.

**Killer**

The war will continue.

It’s for you to decide

to pick up a gun or not.

But you will kill anyway.

You will kill when you

get dressed in morning

kill when you yawn

kill when you pray.

When you vote, you kill.

When you eat, you kill.

When you laugh, when you

turn your head.

The war will continue

with or without you.

You can go to the mountain and kill there

go to the river and kill.

Kill with each step.

Kill when you breathe.

You cannot stop killing.

You are a killer.

You are killing now.

**Artifact**

The gods look out to sea

waiting for their savior to return.

Immortal as a clay pot that a young girl

once carried to the well

they can wait forever lost in their thoughts

while the well dries up and hurricanes

ride the sunrise and all the young girls

marry foreigners and move to high ground.

When the sun no longer casts a shadow

the gods will turn to each other and say

"The people have abandoned us."

**Landscape**

Darkest dark

to lightest light

shedding atmospheres

The landscape lacked perspective

a march through spectrum.

The monkeys knew the vertical world

dragging typewriters up and down

the rainbow strata

writing gibberish

with opposable thumbs

for every occasion.

But no silk tablecloths

for dinner with the queen.

**Faith was Ready**

Just before sleep

your death-fall looms

rushing up like a night train.

Blind in the light

you forget the living ground

when you turn sideways.

Wind in the rafters.

The moon is lynched in

unforgiving sky. Ice dresses

your sunlit wounds.

The parrot with long fangs

riding on your shoulder, mocks you

with your own words.

**Fire**

**Walking Through the Fireball \***

It seemed an ordinary day

only warmer. The hostages

refused to eat but otherwise

the sun came up and the kids

went off to school. The bombing

began a little early and we took

down a drone but nothing unusual.

I counted the dead after breakfast

and buried them between attacks,

shoe shopping among the corpses.

A few friends dropped by for tea

and we tortured the first scumbag

but he wouldn't sing so we

buried him with the others after

trying on his hat. Later, the kids

came home without their fingers.

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**Into the Rain**

One by one we climbed

his name and swallowed his deeds

going back to wild horses.

Seagulls circled overhead

for scraps of humanity a thousand

miles from water.

In his mother's tongue

he gathered all the breath

and starlight.

One bent arrow hit the sun.

So we returned

to our unfinished poems.

**How Dark**

It was so dark

I needed a candle

to open my eye

but all the fire was hiding under the bed.

Even matches trembled.

It was so dark

the moon refused to rise.

So dark, the stars

got lost and even the wind

couldn’t find its way through the trees.

This is how dark it was:

when I called you

no light escaped my tongue.

When I tried to touch you

the ocean froze.

When we woke the children

they were not there.

It was so dark

I forgot how to see.

I forgot the colour of the sky

and the soft rise of your lips. I

forgot that the sun

always comes up, if not today

then tomorrow.

I forgot that death

is the gentle answer to everything.

**Ships Break Up**

I once built a house looking over

the Graveyard of the Atlantic.

Cut the trees and cleared the land.

Carved a road through rock.

And while I pounded nails and bled, ships

broke up on the horizon.

You could hear the groan of hulls

snap of timber, cries on the wind

the wind that never lay down

tore the soul from a man

inch by inch, took his mind in the slow

grind of solitude until one day

a rogue wave

crashed over his bow

and the God-a-mighty sea

took him home.

**First Snow**

How the fineness

in its countless forms, despite

tension in the air

floats in a dispossessed

forest where paint flakes

over grey wood

document futility.

No one could know how these things speak

in silent spaces

graced by shadows in an

understated world.

Suddenly,

we are visitors in circumstance

hung like an echo on winter

our accidental consequence

once so clear

reverting to a comma

in time’s soliloquy.

**Kill the Pain**

I’ve been told

you can't kill the pain.

No. But you can

knock it down.

Kick it on the ground

but oh, she

comes roaring back.

You'd be best to evacuate.

Run for

high ground.

You can't kill the pain.

You can only make friends

with the tiniest

piece of sky

no bigger than a keyhole

though which the throbbing

squeezes like a long

shoelace

and appoint her to

a high ranking portfolio

in your cabinet of one

looking out from your marbled

columns

over the calm Aegean.

**Swimming in Strange Words**

You arrive with nothing to say.

Under the blinding lights, sweat

rolls down your face. You search

for the clever words.

You can only remember

walking hand in hand

with the one who

left you speechless.

Murmurs behind the light

make no sense.

You must have stumbled into

someone else’s dream.

When you speak

strange words

fly from your mouth

like fish from falling water.

**Drinking Angst**

Today I saw

the ridge beams flying

rafters

lining up like stars.

and that was all

I could do.

Venus rose

in her usual place

before I swallowed

the last pint of regret

and hobbled home

to my dark house

drunk on the fear

of falling.

**Another Cosmos**

Who would trust this blind man to see?

The skin has grown over his eyes.

His fingertips are scorched

from feeling the sun.

Ravens follow him in the night woods

when clouds cross the moon.

Stars slide behind his hills.

He holds the wind in his hands

feels the fire in his blood

holds whispers in his mouth.

Even the ravens listen now

for the other side of darkness

when the blood from the thousand

thorns in his tongue

runs down his arms and scorches

the ground.

He will not remove his shirt

though it thunders with flames.

And the whisper leaps from tree to tree

as if unsure of the moon and her eyes.

He sits on the burning ground

and releases the wind.

Even the ravens

take to the sky.

He lays his head in his temple of fire and dreams of light.

**Bleed for the Myth**

We wore indigo robes

to hide the long

daggers of presumption.

Promised immortality

to the walking dead

with the heaven’s whip.

Drove the starving and the toothless

into sleeping

villages of infidel.

A thousand years

and we cannot sleep

and the beast runs.

Too late to renounce your God.

Who holds the

knife to your throat?

The Minotaur has broken

out of the Labyrinth.

**Read My Eyes**

Going through the paces

the pigeons have all

left the attic.

Drawing out

the patterns on the floor

walls raise themselves.

Down a long hallway

you give me the transit

number for reality.

All the zeros stack behind

your shadow in a molecule

of darkness.

The pigeons come home.

Attics fill with their complexity.

Dawn can't keep up.

**I Die**

I weep the blood tears

of a beast without access

to a humane God.

This wind of music

beyonds understanding

and the land in a box

smells of foul poison.

Do not confuse me

with ghosts or gods

or love or destiny.

Do not question my intentions.

I do not intend.

I kill or die.

I run or die.

I live to die.

I die to live.

I die and die and die.

**Fire and Faith**

You smell the smoke.

You hear the crackle

feel the ground and taste

the bitter dirt.

A fire burns

under your field for a hundred years.

Older than memory.

Patient and destructive.

All your dreams

of running water and air

from the mountain lost

in the Minotaur’s mirror.

You search until noon for

your glasses -

find them under the weight

of experience.

You drink dark

water from the tap

and crack

the morning paper.

**Confession**

Oh, I have needs

I keep

locked in a crimson box.

You would never perceive

the ocean

in my prism eyes.

I swallowed the clouds

long ago on

enlightenment’s eve.

Now dogs of peace

snarl in their cages

watching seasons turn

waiting for wolves

to cover my tracks

in new snow

while the fires

from runaways

light up the night.

**Revolution Revolves**

Out with the good.

in with the bad.

Character exchange

in a spin chamber.

Your flag waving

its capsized sail.

Your patriotic

confession.

Long live fools

and mortals.

Carry my broken body

to the marble steps

and set it on fire.

**Holding the Sea**

We ate leaves and grass

in the fire ravaged forest.

A crimson birth.

I carved a phoenix

from your charcoal mouth.

You removed your face.

I stepped out of my body.

You erased your name.

I forgot where I came from.

You remembered the ocean.

Solitude,

take me into your arms

listen to my song.

Same song you’ve heard before.

You know it’s new every time.

**Squeezing the Holy Script**

With a voice like a mask

he spoke from the mist ‘until bell towers rung.

Armies gathered in the dust

for pilgrimage.

You could build a temple

inside their extinction.

Fields and forests lay down

before the crippled moss

and gilded megaphones

marched into the un-promised land

booming the usurped gods’

new language

and the people opened their doors

and opened their wallets

and bought cell phones and life insurance

and simulated happiness.

**One Letter at a Time**

I hear you

walking down the street

with your new concubine.

She wears all the red lipstick.

She manifests lucrative outcomes.

Come, creep to the shoulder.

Whisper

your secret agenda.

I'll not divulge

your sickness.

In the slow

evolution of trust

you can't know

the volcano.

I promise

a signature ending.

**A Short Lesson in Falling**

Like Icarus out of the sun

there is little time to think about mistakes

or about better wax.

You start to burn

with the passion of an ember

caught up in survival, blood thumping

the back of your eyeball

where you took in your short life

and it's long lessons

how every road led to

either water or sky.

And how hollow

your skin has become

even less than hollow

as you kiss the ground.

**Nightstand**

Between the evening news and other sordid

rendezvous

a glass of clear words on my nightstand

was full when I went to bed

and empty in the morning -

Gone

with the leg cramps that hung from

hooks in the oval locker.

The combination lock

made overtures in dreams

and even then, constantly spinning

so that this sentence looked more like a peach

plump and juicy when I first conceived

your eyes

in the lexicon of my

unreasonable thirst.

**Poem on the Wall**

Only yesterday, you wanted

life so much.

You laughed, you cried.

You were ten feet tall

in your bare feet

walking through your unmowed grass

reciting your lines

with the sweetness

I had never heard.

Teeth too big for your bone face

Hawaiian shirt, sunset

and palms

towering

over the real world

in my rear-view mirror.

I saw the rain

pouring out your mouth

those last words, a taste of wine.

You were supposed to die on stage

in wrap-around shades

singing another encore

planets sweeping the sun.

And in the darkness

your eyes.

**Time**

**Tulips from the Sky**

The needle finds the dream

under his skin

and blood oozes out the tiny hole

drips to the ground

on a long silk sash

that catches the wind

and he is lost again

in the DMZ

of his borderless soul

where his solitude allows

him to pull tulips

from the sky

and infuse the moon

with the nectar he collects

in his clown skin.

Later, when the children sleep

he shows us

his hungry tattoos.

**An Intimate Grammar**

*after “A Grammar of Lagos” by Missang Oyongha*

I have come to know the supple nouns

of her carriage,

her climbing verbs as she walks and when she turns,

the soft corners of her hand and the hard

angles of her history.

A conjugation of monologues

caresses her long adjectives in all the colours of her loneliness

and a feathered glance may predicate

across her open parentheses.

Then I swim in her white-water dialect

gurgling from conjunctions of wheat born

eddies. I have slept inside

her round prepositions, posed

for a night pirouette.

I’ve watched revisions in her skin

over poetic years, edits of a rolling

innuendo in her rhyming eyes.

And in the garden of our context, I hold

her syntax in my lips as she combs

the worn-out pronouns from her hair

her run-on sentence stretching

to an endless paragraph

the plot of her limbs lacing

with adverbs of our ivy covered tongue.

And we sip the tea of our own declarative

as the wind swings to interrogative.

**Magpies and Bells**

I hear bells

Bells hold the sky

Magpies, you hear magpies

Magpies hold the grass

You I, I you; I you, you I

MommyDaddy

MagpiesBells

You hear bells pealing

I hear magpies squealing

MagpiesBells

Talk to me daughter

Listen, son

Sister, why?

Brother, oh, brother

Bells pealing -

Magpies squealing

MommyDaddy

You I, I you; I you, you I

MagpiesBells

**Come out from the Scriptures**

The shamans had all

gathered with their tinctures

eyeballing each other

with raised brows

and flurries of incantations.

The Lords of the Manor

threw down their tainted edicts

for a moment of retraction.

Oceans backed up against

a weight of evidence.

I saw that bird

fluttering in your chest.

This was your breathless moment.

You had us by the feather-light

hanging in mid-flight

of cozy assumptions.

The ground was never solid.

The ocean gave up its salt

without a struggle.

The moon and stars

turned out to be

tiny holes in the sky.

**Dragonfly**

Here, the river curls in on itself

and fish dry on the banks.

You sit and watch dragonflies

hover over the water.

This is how you know

you can be all places at once

though the days grow rapidly shorter

and ancients move about you.

You have a notepad

in your pocket but no pen.

The clouds are close

as if it had never not rained.

**Abdication**

Under this tree I lay

my weapons down and wait for peace.

My kingdom is shattered.

Wild dogs have crossed my borders.

The permanent state of war

has torn my limbs and hardened my heart.

My family scattered.

My people ran to the forest.

My ministers sold out to friends

who became enemies.

Here is my sword.

I don’t want it anymore. It grieves me.

You must not ask me to take it up again.

It’s too heavy and has spilled too much blood.

I am tired. Will you

watch the horizon? Will you

listen for the thunder of hooves?

Put your hand here, so I’ll know I’m not alone.

**No Flowers**

Wind had undermined

the machine and fire

concluded the ceremony.

Watching from a great height

we counted the messengers

clothed in indigo rags.

This was your first disaster.

Your numbers were silent.

You stayed until moonrise.

Still, the clatter continued.

All the natural and unnatural

calamities under the breathless moon.

You left your name in the rocks

and came down barefoot

over the naked embers.

Smoke no longer stung your eyes.

**Raven at the End of Space**

At the end of it all

sits a truck stop

open all night.

The neon sign sputters

due to

unwinding entropy

but the coffee is free

with all the ketchup

you can eat.

You might see anyone there:

Jesus Christ, Genghis Khan,

Marilyn Monroe.

The clock reads one minute

after

midnight.

Out back

there is nothing.

You don't even need a coat.

But the raven

has discovered

an infinite garbage pile.

And he has become

too fat to fly.

**Dragon Paths and Crop Circles**

He was trapped in a

driver's seat without

steering wheel or gas pedal.

He had an ignition but

no key. All the widows

darked with emotion.

There were no roads anyway

just dragon paths and the odd

crop circle.

The best he could do was make

motor noises and swing his

hands in the empty air.

He had many stories though -

all the interesting

places he had been.

**Another Side of Truth**

When you speak, dust

swirls between your lips

same dust that fell from the moon.

Same dust Caesar shook

from his sandals on the banks

of the Rubicon.

The endless thread vanishes

to where not

even God knows it's beginning.

Older than light and born

in the womb of nothing.

You hold it in your hand like a bright penny

try to remember where you found it

flip it off your thumb, watch it spin.

Tails you lose - heads you win.

**Butcher at Dawn**

So thin the light that frames

the day’s reminder.

Morning burns the eyes.

The butcher hammers

a rose of youth.

He sings as he works.

Such a divine percussionist.

Drama of dawn.

Heat of noon.

Misfortune’s song

changes

from major to minor.

All viscera discarded

pink roses bleed red

like the rest of us.

**Alone with Flowers**

You weep the old ice tears

that killed the flowers

shells cracking the earth

men falling at your feet.

Your eyes, worth dying for

your flesh, worth killing for.

Your ghost beckons from the bed

and I am frozen in the shifting

smoke of permanent war.

The roar of guns shakes the earth.

I have planted new flowers

that I talk to as I grow old.

Never have they seen my open heart

and they never will.

**A Measurement of Face**

Hair once golden

the colour of mud

and swept.

Ancestors standing

behind smooth skin and

stretched out to shadows.

Gaze focused

like a swift

creature of the forest.

Eyes in the middle

tongue

in its grotto.

The eternal face

if not you

someone you knew.

Someone who inhabits

the skin

behind your eyes.

Patient

ready

without desire.

**Trying to Say Love**

After all the words

shipwreck

in the rocks and drown

what is left but a look

of sadness and

what the sea abandoned?

A confusion between now

and not now. You are still waiting

for bodies to wash ashore.

Meanwhile, the candle you lit

burned down the house.

The garden returned to forest.

Even the sky looks different

cloudless and bluer

than I remember your eyes.

**God Parade**

Another enlightenment

shakes the ground.

I hear the hymns

rocking until midnight.

Snake charmers hang out

under a corner streetlamp

to catch a ray of dawn

and the last

worshiper.

Maybe sell a lifetime

subscription to Neverland

and all you can eat.

Down at end of the street

Neon Jesus

does his famous rabbit trick.

**Your Forgotten Likeness**

*after “Legend” by Jorge Luis Borges*

I have trouble forgiving, but forgetting

is easy. I forgot you long ago.

Did you betray me or did I betray you?

Who killed who? It used to be so important.

There was a colour, not blood, but

like that on the side of seawater.

I was tall and you were not. You had a cat,

I think, that walked with a lisp,

or talked with a limp. But never mind,

whoever you were. I do remember

the light of the comet Lovejoy rising

in the southwest sky, and your picture

hanging in the gallery. Every morning

your breath and I changed the title,

changed the artist.

It occurred to me to take it down

But it might as well stay. It’s as good

as anything else. And I forget

the moral of this story.

**Unpack Your Bag**

There it lies on the creaky bed with broken springs.

A dusty, flower-print duvet on the fourth

floor of the Stardust Hotel like an empty

bottle of wine at the corner

of South Street and Main.

Built between the wars with solid

oak stairs, brass knobs and iron

pipes that rumble at night

and flea-bitten drunks in the doorway who

ask you for a dime to make

a desperate phone call.

The leather straps have faded

and the ornate latch is rusted.

You have the key under your tongue.

Inside are the moldy letters

you wrote before you were born.

But you won’t open it. No.

You’ll save it for your grandchildren

who will laugh at the delicate script

and marvel at the price of a stamp.

**Murmuration**

From space

you can't see the poets

or the plumbers or the boy

with his foot in the stream.

We, the pawns and rooks

the killers and eaters of dead

we buzz the ones and zeros

arc the bell, swarm the hive.

Eternity starts

right here

right now

slides down the onramp

into rush hour of our

endless mortality.

**No Terms**

Trying to speak truth

I uttered only lies. I had it hard

for the soft line.

As a man of my words

I was faceless

but otherwise, fully functional.

The dull edge came easy

with rusted nails

holding my half-severed tongue.

You'd hardly recognize

the grimace. I was afraid

of the price of peace.

The house we built

stands barren in a parched field

that once faced the sea.

The rain never came

though we offered up our bodily

fluids, cries and finger tips.

**Lost Moments**

I was air brushing stars

into the night sky

paying particular attention

to lost moments

and I said to him

We can never get it back

and watched his face cave

in that subliminal movement.

Such a flicker

you would miss it

if you didn't have the love

and he said

I know, but

we weren't born to forget

we were born to remember

and I can never forget

how you cried

and this poem is

already too long.

Can't you feel it?

**The Book of Black Pages**

Picking from the shelf

of dead languages

you will find a small book with

no blank space.

No unwritten words

a dream under each line

devils dancing

in the margins.

Every footnote, a prayer.

Every close filled with thought.

Nothing lost.

Nothing unsaid.

Infinite layers in a density

of stars that no one

can read

and even if they could

one word saturates another.

One mark buries

a thousand years of script

that holds all the secrets.

**Strangers I Have Known**

I remember you

from past lives

like a rise of spring and or passing

of winter, each familiar

but like no other learned gesture.

Once you were a flower, and then

a tree. You rode a great horse

and buried a maiden and wept by her grave.

I remember your ghost

and the wild nights

you tossed aside.

And the time

you carried me across the desert.

Here is the sand in my teeth.

And here, the dirt

under my fingernails from when

you planted me in the corn.

See, here

is the scar you gave me

and here, the kiss.

We are bound

sun and moon

water and fire.

You come. I go. You stay. I return.

We are the tide and the fisherman

sitting in his kitchen

listening to the wind.

I have something to show you.

I’ve kept it all these seasons.

The ink fades and the paper

turns to dust. You wrote this

but I can’t read them anymore.

I can’t remember what it means.

Tell me it isn’t true

what they say about truth.

The words, they seemed

important at the time. The deeds

were always heroic: a stand

a crossing, an act of kindness.

But you, I remember.

And though you may not know me now,

you will, because

we have always been

the dark matter that binds stars to the sky

the reason birds sing

the river, and the sea it flows into

the grass and the snow that covers it.

There’s no way out of it, as much as we

try to make it otherwise in all

this unmaking of the world.

Someday, we will leap into the sun.

You will jump from that rock

and I from this tree.

It will take a long time to get there.

As long as it takes words to fade

and bones to turn to dust.

And we will laugh as we burn.