### NINE SONNETS FOR LATE '90S LITERARY CULTURE

The Midwest : co-sponsored talk

Meistersinger grabs the shears, hiccup at the fraenum. To tell what he sang would break the code, force the school of shad apart from the other American food fishes, "the very prop on which drapery's purpose hangs." Warming up the cotton with a hot iron, the soothing, motivating muscles of our arms.

Artist Friends: poem for McSweeney's

I wanted to make a video, my matted brown soccer-player hair flew, ears reddened as when in the throes of an actual encounter.

Ingrid spontaneously brought me chicken, made fun of my absurd mock-Trenchtown stylings upon giving notice. I had even imagined the cabinets.

Several worn flakes of heart set to feed the porter. Kind basket bartle the fisket.

# Editorial or Publicity: poem for the New Yorker

Mesmerized by my own life, a shower of potential, an alien form listing from side to side along the rows of cubes, ducking in for humane chat that quickly grows oppressive. The move to escape family tyranny in fact an exchange for co-workers foibles and bile, the phone glimpses, snatches of yells, the difference in the level of impingement like being in a bunch of grapes instead of part of a melon. I like that shirt; my silence at your haircut earns me the nickname *Tacitus* so warm is my implicit approval. The pleasure of engaging the electric pencil sharpener mitigated by its lack of a shaving sink, a gap where the plastic bin, miniature but precisely machined, should be.

You are shorter, you are taller, you are lovely, you are smart, you are anxious, you are over your head but thickly blissful. Wool crepe so radiant black, blue. Gabardine is back too.

#### Interview Journalism: poem for the back of the New York Times Magazine

Always bare-armed, catching cold,
Keitel torsoes toward the piano,
wolfs a smoke and drenches half the site in filial
light and bird-like song, uplifting and tired.
Dorothy as control freak;
discovery of Oz as techno-mastery,
Lleyton Hewitt clutching Kim Clijsters's cross.
We toss thoughts like painted balls—
errhumanized, without a title, bouncing up
the musical, muscled beach with determinate fuzzy digits.
People throw bread to the birds
out the back windows of hospitality.
Adjuncts and attributes violate our condition
that branches should not be allowed to cross.

The Midwest: second semester

We allow our attention to spread outward, like dropped laundry.

Immune to ideas, we pitch our way through the sugary thickness to an amazing veldt, salted rodeo, place pointless calls to the hoofy satyr.

"Extraordinarily adept, the highwaymen glide wave-like in fields tilled by people with jobs."

Lifting the horn with three arresting blasts we ride off.

Fiction: a choice

Tapping, slow

and tedious,

consummate and firm.

Trollopine, gigallistic.

Animal prints are hot.

Scan for inevitable

bass response.

Nostalgic Hypochondria: double holiday sonnet for the New Yorker

It's Christmas so I climb into my bigger car, bundle up the newspapers and toss them among the husky rocks.

You mentioned Cheops, like bird sounds, but I can't quite make the bilabial pop and throat clack, though fastidious enough.

Had to go see Leventhal, so I figured I might as well see Tesser, so I got two referrals from the Walfish,

who nodded when I told him what they were for, settle a few old scores.

GP fans out into trinity.

Nightmare trip across the fragmented ferment of the slate gray sky at night, or nearing night,

breath rocketing out in unmentionable rasps, condensing under the nose; I thought then it was a drip

dipping down toward the top raw, kind of bloody maw.

A little hesitation stepping off the sidewalk, a little bread broken into the waveletted life of wiry shore birds, coordinated diving, stopping off.

Most's has closed, Stern's has dropped its veil everything's on sale.

## Alone Together: colony

If subordination implies weakness then each embedded clause adds another bean to our febrile sack.

Make the glazier on your back take off his shirt, turn over the black empathic pitch, cool limey pile.

The air, heavy with bricks, leans toward the van's rack, spilling mannequins into the mock Public Garden, accepting all equally easily.

Ethics: poem for the New Republic

We are both Jewish like Gertrude and Alice and don't practice like them.

We had to go to that part of the cemetery.

I suppose it's good that they have one.

If Louis Zukofsky had died in Paris, or had Louis Untermeyer.

I wonder what Alice had to do when buying the plots. Had they bought them together first, or did Alice buy them after.

Or I think it's one plot.

Anyway, it probably wasn't: Madame, excusez-moi, mais ce n'est pas possible d'acheter cet plot.

It was probably: oui, j'ai besoin d'un terrain là-bas.

The Midwest: third semester

Extraordinarily adept, the highwaymen glide wave-like in fields of unkind, sordid endeavor:

"To service the loon we must have proof that the markings you put down can be pinned to your identificatory tooth, once removed. You must be undimmed in your affections for the secret handshake and shoes, for without them we are damned, doomed to walk to court without riding, completely unable to mount."

House with Bones: with Wallpaper\* in the mailbox at the end of the driveway

As part of the mix, the complexities of academic settings. When we got home, the telephone rang.

We punched windows in the side, had to use cutters, but they built next to us and chalk flew in the soup; they'd hit the water table.

"It's sweet, it's fine," we murmured. Young and dopey, our Hope

can't sleep as pea pods get crushed, wheat husks threshed for her sister's car seat.

Clamoring for your softique, floating spongily on the bed as Rome burns,

"I can no longer see them, far beyond the parapets...." Yogurt on hand. Makes a nice caked cream. New Jersey: poem for Knopf

Since it's all pig shit, turf

controls the criticism, grapeseeds

smother wineries, querulous jackrabbit

bites sink skin.

25 is the new 30. Sensibility is the new sense.

Deb's picks make Huppy

Henry totally spin.

The Midwest : TAship, stipend, thesis

Fiddle on the diddle, and if your creamy shirt is yours, and your pen scratches witchily over Crane's, why not buy the guy a slice?

I'm at the front of the room smiling, didactic. I'm wearing a prophylactic,

"the very prop on which drapery's purpose hangs." Warming up the cotton with a hot iron, the soothing, motivating muscles of our arms. Exercise: therapy

Can't talk to you in nakedese

or touch the perfect

arcs of your ponytail.

My mother as control freak

vacuums the sky, vacuums the vitamin tree.

I vacuum my heart,

drive through the disgusting, well-sunned depths

toward Gargantua.

The Midwest: advisor

I coddled you, yet I couldn't have spoken then, or now

my long lashes brushing softly against the pine, approaching Amber.

The lasts are petering out, the shoes sloughing to a stop;

the birds grip tight the branches and hearts

pulse up the breast. Seen?

Or not. Roll up sleeves.

Roll one for me, too, please.

The Midwest: commencement

Loading up the spernum, juicing up the amp, cussing up the spittle, pewing up the damp,

making several portals, poking several heads, leaning back to mission, corking up the beds,

the sunny farmer boy leaves home, leaves it sitting on the fence.

Touching the knob, tentatively pressing himself into space.

Touching little buds of breath that cloud the storm.

## Development

does not make a steady advance;

after an early efflorescence, a very decided interruption:

If form were all,
'my ass discharges
a sour mash'
would be a great line!

Ugh. As if attempting to save itself, it has learned to keep itself in suspension for a while,

fending off piles with spelt and felt—anything felt, but far too little

is known about the mental make-up of newborns.

Series: from The Mill on the Floss

Every encounter compromised by lazy acquiescence and lazy omission, by trivial falsities for which we hardly know a reason, by small frauds neutralized by small extravagancies, by maladroit flatteries, clumsily improvised insinuations.

We live from hand to mouth, most of us, with a small family of immediate desires which keep us locked in an insane nursery, we do little else than snatch a morsel to satisfy the complaining brood—infirme élu.