Spittledrench the servant

and the old dog sleeper

alone between nurses and swans,

swimming and jungling against one another

while the boys among the willows

made the tigers jump out of their eyes

to roar on the rockery stones

and the groves were blue with sailors.

Gulls and the freight of their bodies

buried by the moon

and the ransom of the tide.

The warm gullet of the radiator

bristled and hissed,

hail chortled,

baskets weaved themselves

beneath the drenches of grass

rolling through all the fields.

I pounded through the birch floor

begging me for something,

some woman or child

or man to cut in half.

The dawdling drag,

the rustic angels

of Spanish verbatim.

The last chord fades. The night is cold and fine.

His master’s voice rasps

through the groove’s bare groves.

Obediently, in silence like the grave’s

he sleeps there on the still-warm gramophone.

The bonsai sits jagged and soft

like a dim window,

dirty feet tossing in clean sheets.

And the silken sad uncertain rustling

of each purple curtain

drawing what might be a breath

from the world awake outside,

softly clawing its way around me.

That dream also timed *me* out,

a lull

in the boomeranging hubbub

of the staggering city I’d just moved to.

The oyster shells and

mollusks ground up into the bricks

seem to swell in the mornings too.

The whole city seemed

like a swollen tonsil

or a cold-hardened nipple when the weather was strange.

When the weather was worth discussing with strangers.

The rain can get bad.

It can really get nasty.

It douses the grapes,

sometimes knocks them off the vine,

crumples them up

on the ground with the pinecones

and the larva and the palm fronds

and the sand.

The healthy yellows veined with brown,

ochre and the lustful fist of wax.

This parchment was perfumed

with saltwater and silk.

The rain rotted through

and the trunk became

this deep thing

with a glazed weight

hung around it.

~

Loosey-goosey

gluey four limbs

whispers on the rocks.

He looks so divine to me

when he looks at you,

tossing a clotted mumble through

the room,

bits of the chimney melting in my mouth.

The green train running, the slow slide

beginning in the bitter depth of mud

ten feet up the mountain.

In a pile of bottles and bones

sits the captain,

coughing up the haunch of a fork

and sneezing silver for a week and a half.

False oaths and curses

are the deepest expression of human alienation;

they mark the return of speaking

subjects to an unintelligible autonomy—

the autonomy of the figure

receding back into the darkness,

a recession colored not by awareness

but by the dim cherry light

swinging in the rafters of the leaking ship.

Conceal and erase yourself

in the pulse of the rain

or the eye-sized crack in the chimney.

Smooth the oar with your tongue.

Dig me out with your fingers,

put yellow pills on my eyelids.

Scare children by crying about me

in public.

~

The moons got ground up.

The moons are no more.

Sinking no more,

spinning no more,

touching themselves in back alleys

no more,

crossing the mouth of the river

with their edges steaming

like bat balls

no more.

We slowly

and I mean slowly

rotted like chalk in the ocean.

The Latin ladies admired him

and under their smiles

dartled the dagger of despair.

Everything looks permanent until its secret is known.

~

I left her rigid among the flowers, her disdain perfected by death.

A girl slowly descended the line of steps.

A long thin wail.

A big boxy scream

peeled

wallpaper and bark.

A cheap marble staircase

clunked alive against the heavy

rainfall sprouting up

in South Florida.

A slanted bowl of limes

heard the sound

and shrugged stationlessly

in the wet air.

A big rambling moment.

~

The beauty parlor is full of sailors,

dumping chits in the burlap crook of a snakehole,

washing and chasing away the women.

The stinking laundry was piled

up to the kids’ chins on the window,

the ambulance turned over on its side,

tapioca curdling under the floorboards.

There is the height and weight of a sound,

its volume and brightness and tone,

and then there’s the memory of it,

wrung through each current of pop

or zip or bang.

They *remembered* it like that,

the perfectly rounded tintinnabulation of a rubber ball,

poking its nose from the playground

through the window of the office

(maybe a dentist’s office)

petering out against the roughness of the carpet,

the beigeness of it, the killing of it.

The killing done with a hairdryer in the alley,

the alley itself so, so wet.

~

In the groin of the natural doorway I crouched like a tailor

Sewing a shroud for a journey

By the light of the meat-eating sun.

Nosing, like a hunger, into my wet shawl,

Ripping the suckling mill from the stream.

Dressed to die, the sensual strut begun,

With my red veins full of money,

In the final direction of the elementary town

I advance for as long as forever is.

A saint—Jerome—and grizzled robe, flawless in its dust.

In the first basement,

standing alongside motors

that looked enormous in the shadows,

I felt very depressed.

The effort needed to kill myself was superfluous now.

This pestilence of brick and edge

is loose upon my face.

But what’s lovelier

than the shape shifting transparence

of *like* and *as*: clear, undulant words?

~

As stupid as a motor is,

like rain but dry and hot.

Miscellaneous weed

strands, stems, undone

firmament

to fishes—

buttery pulp dangling

where the yellow feet

of gulls dabble,

blades clap at the water,

ships churn to bubble—

at night wildly black

brilliantly black and white

through the movies, texture

of white snowy fur,

burned bark curling and deaf,

the taxi’s windshield, piano keys,

reflections that slid over the thick brass baton

that worked the elevator.

Tell-tale skin and teeth

flecking the sleepers

of four young brothers, trailed

for miles along the lines.

The frigid little aqueducts of telephone

lines, the silent lugging

above us all the time.

The Styrofoam baked

off the side of the highway,

crusting and collapsing,

leaking water and color and no smell.

~

When Eccles turns to Harry

bitterness cripples his laugh,

turns his lips in tightly, so his small-jawed

head shows its teeth like a skull.

I should start shouting his name

and clapping my hands,

dousing myself in sound,

but it has been raining all night

and the narrow creek has risen

is renting away

is rushing along

over the mossy stones

is surging forward

with a sweet dirigible music

and I don’t want to entangle it

with my own voice,

like a skull peeled out

through its mouth.

Penumbral umbrellas hulk and bulge

against the moon and the rain,

while you were in the shuddering house,

*your* moon red

and steady in the window.

Trees haze in the fog coming in,

late afternoon sun still catches the stones.

Dog’s waiting to be fed by the empty sink,

I hear the river breathing.

That’s all finally there is to think.

Now comes night with the moon and the stars.

In bracken and phlegm,

thin cotton wrapped around the fruit.

Orange and green and brown

smearing like lips

in their cellophane.

Raise your little chisel

of a glass

coated in ice

and clock yourself

in the jaw

with a fat length of water.

Something screamed

from the fringes of the swamp—

freckle-dappled Death,

three arms in a trench coat

and both feet deep in the sand,

standing guard like a postcard

of a golden retriever.

~

Here in her snooded garment and bare feet,

all ringleted in assonance and woodnotes,

the poet’s dream stole over him like sunlight

and passed into the tenebrous thickets.

Peel the hot bouquet from the wall,

as thin as a paint chip,

lather your back

and your front

with shaved ice and vanilla.

I wrote with a deep

groan of doom in my blood,

bewildered and dumbstruck.

You who have

thundered so cheerfully

would leave us so soon?

With a belch the color of chandeliers

and a wave over your shoulder?

You’ll throw us down off the ledge

to the snap and gush of jaws?

Feel the tilting

when the yolk of salt

seethes up over the rocks

and hums in its rhythms,

and blows through itself to meet us.

Edging over that sly ravine,

your face erupting

through the stale

teething of a cigarette.

~

The shivered shaft

rises from a shellheap

of plastic playthings

paper plates,

And the sheer shards

of shattered tumblers

They were not annealed

for the time needful.

The nude wallpaper

and the brute intelligence

of the torn pipes.

The rusted triangle

in a straight curl.

The sheep

dragging dirt and grubs.

~

The impurity is drawn

to the surface by a combination of gentle coaxing

and violent torture: the form is interrogated.

So the floor sags, as under the weight of a piano, or

a piano-legged girl

as real night music takes over,

pianos and vibes erecting clusters in the high

brittle octaves and a clarinet wandering across

like a crack on a pond.

Saxes doing the same

figure 8 over and over again.

Gargle and stutter and chime,

pissing music like you were sick,

chalking up the board,

greasing the keys

and threading the neck of the bottle,

pumping the brittle grey

knob of railroad gin higher up

over the pine board

and the pig gut strings.

~

But all of that aside I think

that something else can change.

The mountain molts the ocean

and the divers dive again.

The pearl unwinds itself

and the piston shatters.

My father, the surgeon,

turning the big red drums

up, into harsh halogen

and gasses fizzling through

the holes of a mask.

Vulture! Whose wings are dull realities,

skirmishing down the subway stairs

with the rest,

tearing out long wreaths of butcher paper

from the hot typewriter.

Crouching to sniff up the junipers

all shagged with lead and ice,

and swallow the rough spruce,

which can prick themselves distantly as the light house

turns, touching cold to its teeth

and shaking all along the wind.

~

Mostly, I want to be kind.

And nobody, of course is kind,

or mean,

for a simple reason.

And nobody gets out of it, having to

swim through the fires to stay in

this world.

He goes through life bumping

and grinding with a bull on top of him.

He wasn’t somebody

who would leave any footprints on the sands of time,

but there was something special about him.

He had blood in his eyes, the face

of a man who could do no wrong—

gaunt and soft,

total lack of viciousness or wickedness

or even sin caked into his face.

He seemed like a man who could conquer

and command anytime he wished to.

Ray was mysterious as hell.

Caterwauling, clogging my throat

with the brittle swamps of poems,

the coarser pleasure of my boyish days,

and their glad animal movements all gone by.

Tripping through the sunburnt mirth

of my Aunt’s face, the fat things hanging

from her eyes catching the sun

or the headlights from a big rig.

When trains go by

the frozen ground shivers

inwardly like an anvil.

The sound hits off

the ten-masted thing

*and* the millipede in the bunk

*and* the softer belly in the blue bucket,

the stuttering grit as we lifted the shells,

stomped over to the gas station,

and ripped open what we’d bought.

Right from the beginning beautiful.

Also, the sunburn circling his collarbone

and the cupped whiteness inside his ear.

With means, motive, and a tire iron,

the slip-shod

galosh man

running amok

through the back door

of Painter’s Crematorium

past the runny mouth, the grate

to the sewer, and the rusted out fence,

tossed along the hairlip mouth of the shore,

yearning further into giving

himself into the air, breath

strained into song

emptying the golden bell it comes from,

the pure source poured altogether out and away.