

Night Text

Let's imagine I'm translating something to you—
you, asleep, or sleepless or naming
that third place—between—

with the tips of your tapering fingers—

I don't know the language.

It bends.

In the mind—in that strangely shared chamber—
that is, I mean, in your hands,

where you show me those scenes of confusion and flight
with such intimacy, and don't know it—

even *sans* color, *sans* liquor, *sans* shape,
we are twins. Fraternal. Unknown.

The moon, invasive, huge,
lunging in through the windows,
makes no exceptions—

It's true: it will never happen / you'd be surprised.

—first published in *FIELD*

Before Us

There is a mauve photographic bowl of rain
—though some would say a cup
A sultry plague before the fandango of alleys
An armament / arm / armband tossed into the gray / the grim Corvette
at the rehearsal of velour and anise / ankle / anklet
A muzzle of parched starlings sleeping like geckos / geishas / geese
just lounging
after the Sabbath of compromised kilt / kin / kiln
(I'm certain about the alleys and the alliances)
(I'm certain of the colour, of the bowl)
And did I mention that huddle of parrots? Yes. Five, green.
Clustered near the beige of the third-floor windows.
After the honcho / the hole, the whole damn holiday opens
and the dam spills into the castanets of the waiting hand.
And it's here the maraca ticks like a rattlesnake on a short leash.
(I'm certain of the Geiger counter, the saber /
the stomping / the sticking.)
And the compensation—it's worthwhile.
There's a moan in the attic, and one in the basement,
A twisting / tweaking / twerking in the den.
To be clear—did I say that the bowl is the size of a valley?
And did I mention this rush is the colour of mauve?
(As the rehearsal-velour deliquesces to velvet—
velvet dissolving into the smooth vernacular of fur . . .)
There's a cat / a catch in the breath at the edge of the bed in the lush
hush of morning,
a slant / a sliver / a sip of new light in the palms.
I'm certain of the armature of nothing . . .
as I'm certain that the husk has cracked, its scraps concussed.

There's a flamenco that rustles the edges of rust and of dusk and of morning,
that rattles the dust from the corridors of musk:

 this is its cusp

(as the licorice Pernods, as socks bloom into paisley stockings,

 as dawn's viridian muddle of leaves becomes a nest of trust

 and armbands / guns are garters—inveterate, seated deep,

I'm certain of the moaning, the anemone, the memory,

the tangle and the tango and the glow—

as I'm certain of the shade, of this blueberry-vermillion.

And of the green parrots, I am certain.

Certain.)

—after K. Fagan Grandinetti, first published in *FIELD*

A Mirror of Leaves

Even now, I draw you toward me—
Even as the black mold furs the ceiling,
Spanish moss hanging abruptly from the walls,
Draping across the furniture—that Rococo fauteuil and my settee—
In dry organic antimacassars and ratty doily strands
While the edges of the Aubusson carpet, still beneath us, are sipped—
By silverfish and rug beetles and moths and the curtains
Blow into the room, along with the graying leaves of autumn,
Already dead, already light as termites, thin as ash—
And still, your chest is an open door
And birds fly out
Of the vaulted ceiling of your cathedral heart
Like red origami
And tiny white—fly, they fly into the wild air
Of the room as you tiptoe toward me
In your gray mime, like a shadow
As alive as trees
While I gently pull on the long green strand of yarn
As it gathers into a ball
I can hold in my hand, and some would say
I cry red tears or that
My entire chest is as red as my waist-length uncut hair
And that it seems I can only stare straight ahead as I weep
And pull your open heart
Toward mine, even as this island of wool below us
Diminishes as I perch my stool upon it,
Oblivious to the ragged, shrinking edges,
As the invisible choir of insects
Erodes the original design.
And some would say: so focused am I on the wool in my hand

That I don't even notice the growing devastation
Of the room
But I must tell you
—And you can see this for yourself if you look closely—
That the lines descending from my eyes are not tears, no,
Or even blood—not now—
But merely the last of the remaining gold leaf
Etched into these walls in the 18th century
In another climate—
Barely visible now: a blanched, infested background.
And others do not recognize or know, I guess,
The way the skin can rouge in pleasure—
But mine always does—
And though I know I'm facing the other direction
And shouldn't be able to see this,
If you look yourself, you'll find
That the mirror above the fireplace clearly reflects
The gathering clouds that have entered the room
In a gusty rush of nimbus further darkening the chalky
Charcoal look of the crown moldings
And below the mantel, where the fire should be,
Or at least a screen: a massive nest of webs.
Yet even as everything around us grows gradually
Colourless and intermittently devoured
I can feel you coming toward me, though I can't yet see
The exact features of your face. Your step is light;
Your balance precise and honed as a wooden marionette
Freed of all strings, yet—miraculously—choosing to keep in your heart
This one bit of yarn
As I hold and roll the other end
And as I hand you, finally, this small green ball—
This homespun ball of my waiting—

A bird will fly out of your chest into mine,
And the joined cathedral of our twinned hearts
Will be our sanctuary—sanctuary enough—
Vast enough, unending—
And as this infusion of color you've given me
As I have welcomed you,
Even though the room itself grows nearly tarnished, leached
Of hue, drawn down
To a bleached-out play of values and some drafty chiaroscuro
While the weather and bugs peel the paint and even silently lick
The stains from the corners of the wood and burrow through the cornices—
As this color you've managed to preserve in me
—At some sacrifice to yours, I'd say—seeps back now,
Also, into you,
And my gaze shifts from the task of attending to this yarn
To the proper study of your features—
Because, finally, home is simply an article of faith,
An article of mirror; of mirroring—
As your features become clearer, light unbends
The chambers and the hallways of the cathedral
In which it's as though we've really always lived—
And, even now, can't fathom.
And even in this moment of a room's final unraveling,
This one's no illusion
As it opens into the new, unfolding architecture of our future—
Solid and unfinalfied, unformed.

—after Remedios Varo's "Les Feuilles Morte," first published in *Hotel Amerika*

Beginner's Daybook

In this garret-muck: puzzling / parsing / purring, scent-spellbound,
blank / blaring / blazing / bleak,

A green-grey corpus / corpse / corona-dip directs, penetrates, all simmer-silt silver.

The mutant music endures / endows, cistern by cistern, citadel by citadel,

A wheel / a whale of sister, nearly too deep to brim.

Hijacked from your frostwork, magician,

You multiply (muffled) / mull within this marabou-brew, this hocus-pocus,

My heaven heavy with your force, your sixth sense, your storm.

A rambling tremble—gossamer—drones / drops / drowns its

Prairies / its praises—drafty, dreamy, drawn

By these local boulders, orchestral and regal.

Even anxiety nourishes the heart / the hearth, this heat

Prankish as kismet, downright preachy, a kind of

Plea to faze fear. Dear ear / dear earth: a prayer to kiss—no albatross,

Rigid—is right. In this parlance of kirsch, of Campari,

Here is the question no mourning can contrive—

all dazzled flight, dazed parlor—

In bushes / burials native as fir / fire, somber / somnolent beginnings

Kindle hues / kill hubris among the graves / the gravity—all gratitude, all gravy.

I shadow each facet, shake the fabric, fact

A hollow holograph, a holy muddle and meld.

The fugitive brightness of this ebony 8-ball

Corrals / corrects me in this summer suite, its suitcase of sulfur

A sulky rotisserie, sweet rotunda.

The quest, begun, begs, begets this dance, flirtation, masking,

As I massacre your wit

To query, to master the witchcraft

Of your yesteryear, your Yew.

Real State

Thou shalt hang thy blankets from a tree

or thou shalt score a gig as a retail doorman on Rodeo

Thou shalt cover thyself with a sheet of clear plastic and kick at the corner of Broadway and 6th, while pedestrians pass

Thou shalt fumble for keys at the end of the night shift, still in scrubs

Thou shalt hang a right in thy pre-owned 911 Carrera

Thou shalt remove all personal belongings from thy cubicle before the end of the business day. Here's a box.

Thou shalt spring for the 27-thousand-dollar beaded gown not far from the Bois d'Argent

Thou shalt prop the mattress against the eucalyptus across the street from the house in escrow, the two-story for lease, and the reno covered in Tyvek

Thou shalt park thine SLK 320 under the sycamore leaves

Thou shalt not be able to light your cigarette in the wind as you sit on the stoop behind the open storefront display of wighead mannequins

It's an economy storage box

Thou shalt pick up the tab on the ornamental 13-thousand-dollar Buddha and that 6K bottle of scotch in the duty-free

Thou shalt dry thy clothes on the guardrail in front of the Walgreen's and Shabu-Shabu

Thou shalt walk with weights in the evening as the sky turns amethyst then amber and the water comes on, inches from the rusty grass

Drive 45 on the boulevard

Thou shalt leave the couch and the plastic plant on the curb at the end of the month

Thou shalt load the Relo Cube for pickup at Glyndon and Vienna

Thou shalt live in the back of a 1950s Buick with shattered glass

You can use the wi-fi at the Starbucks next to the Dollar Loan

Thou might get a construction job on the northern side of the National Rent-A-Fence

Thou shalt put the tents up after the shoppers leave

Thou shalt no longer be able to afford the unpermitted room within earshot of gunshot and helicopter

Thou shalt “join the 17 million readers who have fallen”

Thou shalt try to sleep in the late afternoon at the base of a streetlamp on the hidden side of a Shell in the Marina

Thou shalt lose thy shirt selling armor, rugs, and chandeliers

No Parking Any Time

Thou shalt stick two signs in the lawn: “house for lease” and “tutoring”

Thou shalt check the stats on the listings from the last six days

Thou shalt organize thy belongings carefully under the overpass

Thou shalt not vacate the premises without giving a 30-day notice

Thou shalt guard the tents at Venice & Globe

Open door policy

Thou shalt not sleep except upon a concrete floor

—first published in *Pratik – The Ghosts of Paradise*

In the Late Gabardine of the Trees ~ Cadenza

One could be ravenous. One could find small bones in the chicken,
Find them by feel, just in time. One could desire to commemorate
The one eighth of the time spent in the company of pleasure, in the presence
Of desire—or the 1/32nd or 1/132nd or the 1 in
Eleven hundred or so
Or the pure/dark stillness of the trees in fog placed like a group of statues—
Just so—as though their arrangement together
Had long been planned, not grown into;
Or a piece of film
And the sound of a casual Stalinist's piss—
Also his wonder,
His wandering
Into the tall ruins of a church
(Why do I always think of Chernobyl)
That could just as easily be the long-abandoned remains
Of a cooling tower
Or a cave
But just below the cool and concrete wall
The remnants of a painted face
As big as a body—
One could say *I want for you to close your eyes*
And listen. Just listen.
What I have given.
What I have given up.
What I would give—
And the way we just seemed to walk into the middle of something
Already happening.
Incidental witnesses
Recording:
 A sweater slipped on backwards

Label touching chest above the breastbone
Dirt gathered around the edge of a nail
Or the way skin feels when it hasn't been washed—
Or the man takes off his cap
As if about to look in the mirror
And it's 1949
But he meets the gaze, instead, of those gigantic, distant eyes—
Translucent—and how do they do that,
Painted, as they are, on stone—
Of the face still visible on the wall,
Welcoming, dispassionate,
Just as a helicopter circles
60, 70 years away at the edge of a distant continent.
Finally, late winter comes.
We can almost feel the mud
Giving under the tires of the open-canvas jeep
In graytones in grayscale
As the road splits.
One could walk away.
One could.
One could turn back.
Because you sometimes swear.
You say *I am fucked. You are fucked.*
He/she/it/they/ is/are fucked.
We are.
Or the way Stalin's face unfurls.
Gigantic backdrop.
Facing no one.
Deserted trees.
Or, near sunset, in the empty wheat field
And its single tree—

—after Pawlikowski