

After Spicer

By
Nima Babajani-Feremi

Acknowledgements:

The implied originality of a work of art often requires us to view them in near perfect vacuums. Their originality seems to come from a singular source- the one poet who writes his poetry. This reduction removes the artist from the entanglement of their lived realities. Slowly, the work of art becomes a product of spontaneous generation by a nebulous architect. We forget that for art to exist an artist must always exist prior. The normative pre-prerequisite for creation will forever be a human, one who has made and nurtured into an artist. You may not know me, but you must know that I am human. This work is built on the foundations of all those people who have made me human. Only through the guidance, belief, and inspiration of my family, friends, professors, and mentors was this work made possible. I am and will be forever grateful to you all. These individuals made the poet who is writing to you now.

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-To my friends in Durham, Boston, and all around the globe, thank you for making life worth living.

Words will never be enough; nonetheless, I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

Dear Mr. Spicer,

I must say, Mr. Spicer, you have set a very dangerous precedent for us young poets. You never thought that the ominous practice of conjuring dead poets could ever be used against yourself by some sentimental and besotted college senior writing his undergraduate thesis. Maybe you did think some poet would ignore all the perils of such a practice, but I know you never thought that I would turn to you. It was preordained to some degree. We are poets of the Coast. And although I am writing from the rice fields of the Caspian and you are writing from the California coast, we write to each other endlessly. You and I will meet, asking the same questions from the ocean. The Coast reunites those who inquire about the waves rather than themselves.

Since I have your attention, I will indulge you with some lofty poetics. Not for our sake, as you will disagree with me before I am even finished, but for the sake of our readership. Mr. Spicer, I revel in the artifice of words. To me, there is no use for a poetry so pure that it can point to a 'lemon' in the exactness of with which it exists in reality. If poetry functioned as such, there would be no need to write. Not for oneself and definitely not for others. The impetus of poetry comes from a dissatisfaction with language. Language was built to fail, so humans would make art over and over again trying to explain what they see and feel. Words that "point" to the reality as such seize to be poetic in their function; that is to say, no new art could come from those words. Poetic language exists in that zone of continual inability. No perfect poetic use of language exists. The potential to feel through poetic language by inferring the emotionality of a poem onto oneself would become void in the light of a 'perfect' language. This is why I philosophize about imperfection. I know language is imperfect because I am writing to you now. Because I will be writing long after I am laid to rest.

I have kept you for long enough. I find this whole practice of séance quite taxing for the both of us. I will not be responding to any of your letters. I will not be writing you back. I have written you for the sole purpose of thanking you for everything you have done. Your vocabulary has done this for us. Thank you, Mr. Spicer

P.S.

I have included some translations of modern Persian poetry and a few of my own poems that have been profoundly influenced by that tradition. The chief inspiration of all translation is the ingrained creative process of every translation; however, unlike your translations of Lorca, I set about this task with a different goal. These are my most faithful translations. I will not belabor you with the difficulties of learning Farsi for the sole purpose of deciphering their translational efficacy.

P.S.S.

Give H.D and Duncan the warm regards from the entire class of English 890-S. We miss you all.

Yours,
Nima Babajani-Feremi

Lorca's Peonies

It has not been more than a night,
since I've rebuilt Persepolis in
a dream,
walking out an elevator, between
limestone columns,
hands stretched towards your face.

The parking lot heaves
against the obscured sounds of an
American morning,
the starting of days and cars.
Your smile recedes as the day rises,
severed
and in parts.

Heads rise through rice stalk walls.
I understand harvest songs,
strummed by the Caspian,
but you are not here with me to feel.

While searching for Lorca's peonies in a Persian garden,
an opium den breathes open,
my late grandfather ushers in tomorrow.

Translations of Five Modern Persian Poems

If time in the afterlife permits, you should read the work of the Persian modernists, Mr. Spicer. For the time being, I have translated these five poems and one of my own from Farsi to English to the ease your initiation into the tradition.

The Wind Will Carry Us

By: Forugh Farrokhzad

In my little night, alas
the wind and leaves concord,
in my little night, worry ruins me.

Listen,
do you hear the dark gust?
I am looking strangely at this fortune,
I am addicted to my own despair,
Listen,
do you hear the dark gust?

Something now passes through the night,
the moon is scarlet and frantic,
and on this roof that could collapse at any moment
the clouds, like a mass of mourners,
appear to be awaiting the moment of rain.

A moment,
and after, nothing.
Behind this window the night is shivering,
and the earth is
on the verge of ceasing to spin.
Behind this window, an unknown figure
worries about me and you.

O, your figure green head to toe,
place your hands like burning memories
on my loving hands
and leave your lips like the warm feeling of being
to caress my loving lips,
the wind will carry us
the wind will carry us.

A Cold Winter Night

By: Nima Yushij

A cold winter night
even the sun's hearth, does not burn
like the hearth of my lantern.

And like my lantern
no other light is warm.

And like my lantern,
no other light is warm.

The shining moon is frozen.
In the passings of my neighbor, I turn
on my lantern in a dark night.

And it was a cold winter night,
the wind twists with the pine
amongst dark huts.
It was lost from me within
narrow paths
and still the story is alive
and it is still uttered:

“Who shines? Who burns?
Who carries this story in their heart?”

A cold winter night
even the sun's hearth, does not burn
like the hearth of my lantern.

Tree Frog

By: Nima Yushij

My farm has dried
besides the neighbor's farm.

Although it's said: "crying on a shore nearby,
mourners amongst mourners."

Herald of cloudy days, tree frog!
When will the rain arrive?

There is happiness without contentment.

Within my dark hut, not the slightest happiness exists.
And the wall of ribcage reeds inside the walls of my room are bursting.
Like the heart of companion exiled from companion.

Herald of cloudy days, tree frog!
When will the rain arrive?

The Vultures

By: Nima Yushij

In the place where sun and clouds struggle,
where there is mist under the sun,
and a mild moisture
moves through the mountain,
and in between a valley towards a stream
there is a constant murmur.
accompanying the moisture
over a peak.

Suddenly vultures,
two old and weak vultures
through their vulturing greed
made skin and bones, sitting
together in heart with scarlet eyes
looking at each other.

What kind of companionship is this,
what can explain their kindness,
why did they become companions,
no one knows.

For whichever of these two friends dies,
the other will rip skin and bones from the dead.
In order to eat one another's flesh,
like this
together they sit.

O Heart-broken Lover

By: Nima Yushij

Sitting at the foot of a willow the whole day,
sinking its head, the branches of the willow,
their heart would burn for themselves,
any soul who heard its wallows from a far.

O heart-broken lover! Sing under the green willow.
At this moment, to one side, the water of the stream
like the lover, crying louder,
flood of bloody tears flowing from the lover's eye
would break even a stone's heart.

O heart-broken lover! Sing under the green willow.

Lovers take refuge in your slight shadow.
Call him not a sinner! All his mistakes
I have forgiven, it is not the poor soul's fault.

O heart-broken lover! Sing under the green willow.
O ungrateful break-promise, foul kindness and unloyal,
in my heart, I will reproach you forever and everywhere.
The lover said to me, learn love from me,
open your heart to the next lover.

O heart-broken lover! Sing under the green willow.

Caspian Night

By: Nima Babajani-Feremi

The trees of the night
(once again)
lie with the tone of the morning.
We open the lie of the night
with our wet eyes.
The wind's skirt playfully
rebukes
this disillusioned city.

I am distanced from my own depression.
From outside of myself
I ruin myself.
I know nothing of the self.
I have written my name
on the faces of rocks
smiling towards the ocean.
I have cleaned this letter with bitter blood.
During this night and the next
I await sleep.

One lie could save me.
In this night,
in this city,
no soul requests a thing from me.
A lie, even,
a white lie,
could save me.

The Night Canvas

Through the bedroom's single window,
the early night's moonlight dances,
the negative reflection of foliage outside,
The shadows separate at their poles,
leaving the negative space of your silhouette
on bedsheets.

The pond beyond the trees lurks still.
The moon nets the translucent canvas of fish,
as they come to breathe the shore.
You are a painter,
painting in dead white.

The lights broken,
dangling over the kitchen counter,
the wind through the window
murders shadows.

The man from the asylum,
a short stroll from my apartment,
reminds us:
"She's gone and
the poems aren't going to bring her back."

After the Sufis

I.

Wine-violet orb
-senses of self-
revolves around
the gourd of life,
dropping in,
(flat rubber-echo)
bounce back out,
burst splashing,
wine-violet orbs.

II.

In between the oscillations of a heart-beat
and all the hearts beating,
You are thrown back into the arms of human-ness,
faced with all the other masks of skin.
You choose one.

III.

Wine-violet orb
revolve around
wine-violet orbs.

After Alexandria
(for Nathaniel Mackey)

In an effort to save the store of ancient texts during the burning of Alexandria, the contents of the library had been emptied out into the Mediterranean. Where, maybe, the wandering parched could drink from the sea and store the remnants in their bodies.

I had stumbled or awoken there,
looking up at the lightkeeper,
floating above the pharos,
adorned in sequin scales layers of light,
walking down an invisible staircase
towards the furnace-shaped embankment,
where the grey water encroached
upon the lost ink,
he spoke to the coast,
sieving the mixture through
the callouses of his fingers
-as if his quill was fashioned
out of sandpaper and thorns-
separating the ink from the Mediterranean,
emptying the remains of Alexandria
into an endless well.

The night painted black,
except under the sole light of his lantern,
keeping safe the costal knowledge.
I, too, bathed under the warmth of his light,
unaware that my tears too
were the black blood
sifted through the fingers
of the poet.

I followed him inside,
Seeking shelter in the
translucent walls of the pharos.
He sat,
rocking with reverberations
of the coast outside,
the lighthouse rocked into a lullaby.
Passing the lantern to me,
pointing to the well,
ushering me to look inside
within the infinity of swirling thoughts
a light emerged from far away:

“Poetry is in that ink.”

observations from a grocery store parking lot

From beyond the prison walls,
seagulls bathed in fine ashen velvet,
adorned in coats of arms,
arrive for the first time.
They perch on the hallowed metal
of streetlight elms.

Their claw prints faded
into the shallow edifice
by a different sun,
the first sun,
the one that painted
around their figures
before they would
appear to us as
the ancient race of men,
as golden scarabs,
the last tears of a god
bearing witness to
the flat hills of
sound that flattens over
horizon time.

Each tree
its own peak
in its own valley
each branch
dips below
audible sound.
Its leaves latch to ears,
infesting it with the low-tremor
of the Earth's core-
the first Earth.

And time
harkens the heavy gust,
pushing the corpse cart forward,
moving our time forward.

Dear Mr. Reznikoff,

I am not a particularly spiritual nor superstitious poet. I find it hard to reconcile with this method of communication. Why are poets always evoking other poets, writing elegies for those who have forsaken words? This was not my doing. It was Mr. Spicer who first blossomed the seed of such an underhanded medium in my impressionable brain. In any case, you are due an apology or two from a young poet who has taken a few liberties in the readings and interpretations of your body of work. I am sure it is a great displeasure for the dead to be awakened for the vain means of poetic reverence, so I will keep my remarks short.

I, too, am a poet of the small. Oppen noted that your poetry spells out the granular level of details that occur between the instant a light switch is flipped on, spreading photons across a stale kitchen table. To those before you these instants were of no intrinsic value. You inscribed them in your poetry and gave each moment the importance of an impending wedding proposal. Your poetry takes its constitutive material from those milliseconds between seconds. The latent momentum of time pushing itself forward. Within the objectivist tradition, you championed the emotional necessity of all moments. You have given this gift to the poets of my generation.

You have given me a much greater gift, the gift of a perfect inspiration, one so distant from potential achievement that it will forever serve as the birthing bedrock of my poetics. I have learned and cried with your accounts of the Holocaust. There are some scholars of your work that have trouble placing “Holocaust” within your oeuvre. I do not. It is the same philosophy that drives the poetics of your poem set between two set of knocks on a stranger’s door. “Holocaust” reclaims details in history and gives them immediate necessity. That is what you have always done.

With the brazen foolhardiness of youth and against the advice of more refined poets, I have decided to include a work of mine inspired by “Holocaust”. I know that I am incapable of writing anything new about these events. To say that I write mere repetition is understatement. Yet poems like these must be written, or the words in “Holocaust” would become mere words, safely outside the reach of emotional transference, the devastation lost. These poems are written after your ethos that grants infinite patience to all moments through reflected sympathy, to love through trying to feel what the other feels.

This apology is long overdue. I am sorry for taking your practiced and refined poetics and transposing my crude metaphors onto the stories that you have painstakingly told. Some will read the poem and ask me to apologize for something else entirely; a poet of ambiguous Muslim decent should not write about the Holocaust. I cannot apologize for that. I am sorry that my expressionist poetics flows against the current of your objectivist style. I am sorry your poetic style was lost in those poems. But know that your ethics always serve as my chief poetic inspiration. I dedicate these to you, Mr. Reznikoff.

Yours,
Nima Babajani-Feremi

Azadi Square

1.

In Azadi square
and yesterday in Divandareh,
morning prayer wakes mourning sparrows,
waking the slaughterhouse citizens.

2.

The news of the western reception
to the protests
stirs into a cup of morning tea
into a single bedroom
apartment in Tehran.
Through the window,
they forget death and
bow to mirage passage.

3.

Weaponless war
topple
stacked bodies
poetry taps
against
aging gates.

4.

Mothers wash my brother's body
with my sister's scarf.
The dead are all made one.
The mourners individually weep.

5.

The dustman washes
martyr streets with martyr blood,
collecting souvenirs for his daughter,
(hair ties to keep her hair out of her face
when she comes to collect
her own souvenirs tomorrow)

6.

The minarets announce the arrival of Western freedom:
"Welcome to the cotillion, past company."
The dustman dances,
dances because she cannot sing,
whispering to her doll:
"in this soil I will find maternal embrace"

7.

In Tehran,
and yesterday in Divandareh,
Azadi means freedom and
mourning sparrows sing lullabies
to abscission souls:
“I love you.
You must guess the rest.”

“To death.”

*they would send those who were left behind a note—
and they did:
it was in Hebrew and all it read was: “To death.”*

-Charles Reznikoff, Holocaust (p. 75)

humid and all about:
death,
but somehow for a moment,
surface consciousness was calm,
the taste of a bitter orange
seemed to capture
all of everything—
his last thoughts
were more concrete than
toothbrush bristles
and the urge to remember love.

death
was always there,
its calm smile
nursing the young Jew.

gravity folded through and
cratered consciousness,
giving weight to the
dry asphyxiation
muffled through the dark slab,
earth rising up to greet him anew,
pressing against his raw chest,
his eyes finished.
it was as it was written:
“To death.”

Below the City

In a city split in two by an infinite chasm, a man is made the forever martyr. The spectacle of his martyrdom serves as near-living lesson for the city's citizens. School children and his mother visit the man. These are his daily thoughts and visions:

Beyond my heart,
my body is still.
My hands fastened
by invisible chains
forged by the sun's blacksmith.
My body is held up through
pure tensile force.
The moisture
in my throat
bounces joyously against mountain walls.
I bear sleepless witness to the rest of days
while they drink tea in cups.
They bear witness to my
ceaseless witnessing.

Yellow busses empty,
little tourists
placing wreaths at my feet,
offering-candy to my frozen picture.
Uniformed men usher the more daring ones
away from my suspended self.
They notice the snipers,
trained on my joints.

My mother
approaches me,
kissing the red dot on my forehead.

Gaza

Hell's armory has no bullets,
its junkyard filled with limbs.
Children fashion spears out of rib-cage lyres,
throw themselves on circle saws,
biting down through their eyes,
the mess of blood
 instantly evaporates,
 against the burning limestone.

Ontic Gaza:
those too young to die,
idly watch the passion of
blue and red phoenixes
against the orchestral arc
of an evening sky.

The day is much too tired to keep on.
Angels lay down concrete rain.

They have only kissed their parents,
almost having learned,
that dust is the human condition,
robbed of nothing more than years,
the skies of Gaza bury ghazals,
in the shape of human bodies.

Dear Mr. Trakl,

I write this letter half-heartedly, unsure of the utility of words exchanged in prose between poets. You will find, even in my most thematically and stylistically divergent poems, an inescapable chase after your own poetics. Your poetry comes from an intimate distance, aware of the intrinsic separation between reader, poem, and poet. Yet this distance collapses as the poem unfolds. I have not yet deduced why it is that your poetics functions as such. Your most faithful translator, late American poet James Wright, attributes it to your deliberate patience. Yet not all patient poetry prevails. I believe the camera of your poetics accrues the details of the world painfully with shaky hands, suggesting to the reader that a “red fish” rising is just that, a singular detail locked away in the world of poetry. Each phrase reduces to its literal implication; the constituent words pretend to be nothing but words. It is not the tone of a literary surrender. Rather, it is the tone of an internalized grief, as one becomes aware that words cannot encompass all. The reader is left to search for all that was left behind by words, and suddenly each details appear anew. In fact, your words gain an independent sentience as they become aware of their fatal flaw. Your words and your reader experience the same mutual epiphany as they realize that the world is untouched by poetics. Only the anxiety of untransferable human experience remains. Your poems point to the borders of a painting, forcing us to reconcile with art’s innate mimetic quality.

I have often made the comparison between your poetics and Kiarostami’s cinematography. There is scene in “Close-up” where the camera follows an empty hairspray canister rolling down a Tehran street. The tension of the movie is made immediately implicit; each house lining either side of the street holds the potential for a similar tragedy to the one unveiled in the film. Your poetry brings me to the same conclusion. The sequential accretion of words forming the normative details of a poetic world forever leaves behind an inexplicable qualia. Lists can never contain the whole through the accretion of individual elements. Your poetry makes this inescapable. In its negative effects it gains emotive power by noting what cannot be written. But your poetics also represent a positive relationality to real life; as the reader realizes the significance of human experience, the world is reified in place of words.

You have reminded me that the language of poetry will forever be differentiated from all other uses of language through this praxis. For that, I am indebted to you for sparking the passion of poetry within me. Thank you, Mr. Trakl.

Best,
Nima Babajani-Feremi

Kiarostami filming a scene from my dream

The late Persian film director, Abbas Kiarostami, was last spotted in my dreams, uncharacteristically filming a Surrealist film. In the scene, a group of spectators look down onto the monastery courtyard where a young man decorates the center of the garden. The spectators are unaware that the statue is actually a man.

Apostles and mothers
looking down
through the monastery window.
There, some contour of
a man made in clay.

As the rain washes through
deserted garden,
kashkull thrust through
his body,
filling with damp beads of rain,
empties
over his head,
rain becoming nails.

The pasture melts.
The Dervish cannot say
why his tears flow inward,
flooding his nothing being.

Poems after Trakl

1.

The Moon Lily

The low falsetto tremor of the moon's tears stops,
except,
 for a single bead
 falling towards
its predestined grave.

As, the constellations waltz-flash,
larks leave jet-stream lies:
"The night has forgiven you."
Drunk beasts entertain armistice talks.

Cymbals in the clouds,
 silent pallbearers to the bead, watch
it fall on the moon's favorite lily.

The death of the moon's favorite bead.

2.

The song of the albatross against
 the dark kingdom above
 does not bring daybreak.

The confused cannulations of inner-thought
frenzy.
Accelerating towards
many days ahead,
the day where no other days follow.

3.

Under the frowning brow of the roof,
a lantern swings against a window.

The heartless murmur
of clutched objects,
packed tight between
thoughts,
in the form
of lines, oneself does,
starts engines, doesn't
read enough, the other self
thinks about these things,
anxiously waiting for the moment
where it will be allowed that divine
right to do.

A frightened oak sighs.

4.

The epsilon in the atom is lost,
light bends through bright memories,
where persons are not
their material
completeness.

In the confusion of colors,
some kind words disperse,
contradictory
to brash actions.
Love somewhere in between.

What radiates is.
What's more is words,
not left behind.

5.

After The Blind Owl by Sadegh Hedayat

If time permits you, Mr. Trakl, you should pay a visit to Mr. Hedayat. There is a Persian Kafka amongst your lot. Give him my warm regards.

The building is burning and burnt.
My words are shuddering and spent
on verses, displacing what
stirs inside
to outside of myself.
Traffic slows to the speed of
my racing heartbeat.

Soft things are caged inside of me.
I wish they were birds-
things that sing and never fly.
Humans can do things I can do,
but I'm not.

A dastardly light brings a lantern
up to the foul appendages of a soul,
its reflection is not relieved
by the eyes of passing souls.
Their gossip breeds gossip, as
I stand witness at my forever-trial,
foot loose, watching with
neck noosed; I pray they look
at me with the spite
of a mongoose for a snake,
not competing for the same prey.
Rather, the shook state of consciousness
when predator is introduced to predator.

Dreams to Persepolis

These are a collection of dreams, thought fragments, and scribbles on the margin of class notes- next to my thoughts on Hegelian and Kantian ethics, Gramsci's analysis of Canto X, and questions about Derrida's "Signature, Event, Context,".

I have scored these lines in the manner approximating the type face after the late master, Larry Eigner (1927-1996), born with cerebral palsy, in a wheelchair for most his life, he wrote over 40 collections of poetry on a 1940 Royal manual typewriter using only his right index finger and thumb. He could not see Persepolis from his front porch, but I'm sure he would have loved to see it. I write this suite of poems hoping to bring Persepolis to Eigner in Swampscott, Massachusetts.

#1

Edging past

shallow

waters

towards

the world that survives, potential melancholia.

Death of
an arid lake.

Across

its

s k e l e t o n ,

enshrined in silvery light,

a doe drinks through

all remaining remains.

#2

my soul drifts atop

subconscious

sea.

Desolate ruins

island

around me.

You are just distraction for
the dervish.

#3

Head heavy with humidity:

in rooms,
my footsteps forget themselves.

Time lurches my spine

forward, terraforming into a tree,
the shade of its tree
paints me,

backwards, negating possible events.

The cold well of the present
wets my eyes.

Fractions of seconds-in-seconds
web

endlessly to other possible-worlds.

#4

The machinations of flesh
have hierarchized
heart,
partitioned
digits,
each to their
lonely task.

Signal stimulus,
whereby
automatic hands breathe
through
a limb,
and lungs
move down
your body.

#5

The burial of the Huma.

The solid ash of its tears
sprout columns,
supporting open-air cage,
erected as Persepolis died.

O Huma, tears of my heartland,
have we drank through
the moisture of your garden?

Buried where no streams exist
to unearth your voice.
Have we killed Persepolis?

O Huma, when you touched
the Earth in Shiraz,
your labour as Atlas ended.
We were flattened.

#6

Burn no bridges!
Burn the water.
Pour all thoughts
in the light.

Die

unexpressed.

Hands burn
reaching
through
or out
this tar-river.

Let thoughts burn alone
in festering pits
of reddened eyes;
that is your anger.

Reach towards society.

Be rejected.

Mouth
forever agape,

once opened with hope,
now
closed with kerosene.

Burn no bridges,
burn the water.

#7

There is only the one image.

I have
burned it.

there is no time,

I am god,
resting
a restful rest,
where the dreams of Gods comes easy.

The spires of my church
are consecrated
after I think.

As long as thoughts
flow endlessly,
breathlessly
flat,
nothing leaves.

The ephemera outside.
I am god inside.

As long as
fluctuations
from nothingness
to fulness
are sequential,
I sublimate to God.

#8

If your blood could grip my blood,
as I looked down
the gentle slope of your jaw,

I could think of just you.

blood has flown off to make
lush the field of scentless lilies.

#9

-firstly-

Each word

dragged

through the spine of the poet,

still

-alive.

The vertebrae split open,

hacked rather,

in two,

gingerly

body still beating,

bundle of exposed nerves.

That is how the first word is written.

-secondly-

[redacted]

#10

Speak into the

full plastic night

all those things

you want,

all that

stagnates you.

The electric-shrill of nerves
speak back to all time.

#11

(Translated from Farsi)

They took many breaths
with them,
as their shadows
stole the Earth.

Tired from counting seconds,
we soldier life on shoulder flesh.

#12

When you finish counting
and land on a number-

the universe only tallies the last breath.

But I

I am obsessed
with how your neuron clusters
moved between
each
number.

#13

In a world without you or mirrors:

I sink teeth in flesh
frozen.

I find reflections
in blood.

Sketch silhouettes
with darts.

-funerals for words and me.

#14

Jade obelisks stare back,
your desert threatens starvation.

The impossibility of movement
mortalized.

I palm for
where
I misplaced
myself.

#15

In this state of infamy:
tired eyes close onto
tired body enclosing
tired soul where
the visible world
tired of the weight
of tiresome bodies;
betray their weight
brought to surface
where
tired body enclosing
tired eyes close
onto words.

#16

After Mallarme's Swan sonnet

There was an accident last night:

I went to look up
"what is poetry?",

but I made love
to the numb palette
of the day
by pure incident
I ascend with swans
into frozen lake.

#17

I have felt this before,
 this
 tying up of
 arteries to the
esophagus,
stitching close lips
 screaming out
 through eyes.

#18

Perhaps the world will end during the next set of secret
funerals, while the corpses for the last one are being found.

#19

we me
 lay love
 through
slaughter.

we me
face away
 from pall-bearers
 holding casket-clouds
 pouring rain.

we me
champion fraternity
so long as
lips are sealed.

#22

Making love to you through the history of
all strummed
heartbeats.

waltzing on
whiskey aged
oak-barrel ship,
as I pour with
purple melodies
(Cotton candy rain)

If this is improv,
then I have given my body
(in a way, sacrificed it)
to take your hand.

A ballet for us
confined within me.

#23

At the Durham Filling Station

It's pie by the slice
trees bythesun
hypochondriac stalks
talk

biscuit insulin shots.

It's not bossa nova,
grittier.

It's as much melody as Alex
can afford to still make 83 cents
on his dollar.

#24

I wake up on my knees

singing blues.

This is nothing.

I'll miss you more than

blues misses blues.

#25

After Neruda's Poem XV

I'd like for you to pretend
 I am absent,
and you do not hear
 my cries from so far away.

They name torrents,
 wailing through.
 Through wailing,
 torrents to be named.

As you dance with new tulips,
 I'd like for you to pretend
 I am not mourning
 each new sun.
I'd like for you to pretend
 this is not heart-blood
 nor sun-faded love.

#26

Love through Myopia

Bringing the room
 down my arteries
 into cavities
 from my young teeth.

 The same myopia
 that brings you closer.

#27

I'll draw the sketches of your days in my dreams,
as I lay in the sea,
 flesh and blood mute.

On a boat I built,
 you furl.

As I write the number of each passing second
 to keep myself from counting moments,
 you come to me.

Far enough along,
you,
 too,
 will be
a number to moments.

#28

There is life
beneath
 dead edifices
 boiling inside samovars,
 and tea without cups
 circling
traffic lights.

 A street walker crying for her son.

#29

Nothing is yet complete,
the camera is still running in the grave:
post-mortem anxiety.

Not tears from the sky
blacking the light inside,
the persistence of anxiety
runs between the frames
of optic film.

#30

Plagued with the illness of caricature,
jade static damning
my throat,
n a u s e a in arteries
void of volcanic nothing
becomes
life in brush strokes.
I age in millimeters,
in between decimal points.

#31

After Baudelaire

Far too much lust
for the birthed
virgin day

Perfumed candied pine
fettering about.

 "This is Earth enough,"
yet it lies securely
outside.

Practiced ruins,
 plinth heart,
 shaped bone,
 bonfire purple.

 Demons lie within
 cuffed & muzzled
leering down,
as angels chirp.

#32

In the city of
 ceramic pigeons,
minarets encased
in wooden bodies,
 workers burned through like coals
 cry for the hour,
 -for days-
 longer than
 they are silent.
At their feet, tear ducts sprinkle.

#33

Red flares fired above the beat of
albatross wings, stiff
with wax and stifled desire.
The stale taste of sex heightened through their shrill song.

#34

For Gramsci

The soldier's heart is true,
its emerald left home.
More than the tobacco
mosaic of
paratrooper skies,
war lives in the taught skin of young men.

At home:

Walnut groves bear plum fruits with nuclear pits.

The cold weight of the moonlight empties dissenters.

Each soldier washes his eyes with frigid water, outside the
tent, scanning through endless projected shrouded.

"Live in my soul,"
he thinks of his lover.

"You are the blacksmith of lies under true-blue skies,"
he writes to his lover.

#35

Somewhere,
 within a forest,
 all trees fall.
I am there.
 Ready,
 with kerosene heart
 to burn body
 for the forest.

Somewhere,
 rain pours from my house
 onto clouds
 below.

I am veritable doom,
pressing liquor belch deeper into you.

 Preserve speech through this stench.

#36

How many of my thought atoms
 do I give to you
 before I am all yours?

#37

My eyes are greedy
 misaligned.
Soul sees you the other wants you,

I want to
 possess the black & white frames
 of your childhood memories,
 as seen through the camera of my childhood's eye.

#38

I prefer the smell of your sundress to your favorite flower,
iris-purple pollock dew drops sketched onto the inside of my
iris.

I see the world in words, understood in the limited alphabet of
your name.

Phonemes sapped of memories and fragrance.
The shades of iris haunt my syntax.

All my words are read by your eyes. I have no other way to see.
Even these.

#39

The golden stag

embellished in photon tears,

running through time,

bringing time,

knocking on basement windows,

through which, leering eyes

urge mine to close

in completeness.

Dear Dr. Donahue,

Allen 304B will forever be my favorite place at Duke. I, too, am finding it a bit strange that I am writing you a letter to express my gratitude when I could stop by your office and tell you this in person, followed by our customary conversation about Seinfeld, Kiarostami, or German expressionism, but the truth of the matter is that this project would be incomplete were I to not name you as its chief inspiration. After all, it was you who recommended me Spicer's *After Lorca* and every other poet who now sits on my literary pantheon. I might not have said this to you in person, but you will forever be my biggest inspiration. Where it not for your resolute modesty, I would have suggested naming this project *After Donahue*. Alas, a letter and many more conversations will have to do.

Although I have now learned better, there were times where I would name drop an obscure poet with the intention of stumping your endless well of poetic referents. Instead, I would leave your office with their biographical information, ten additional recommendations of related poets, and a feeling of pure awe. You have shown me that poetry is and will be forever. From your wisdom, I have learned that there is comfort even in the anguish of poetry; even when words congeal at the hand, there is sanctity in writing.

I'll keep this letter short as I am nearing the submission deadline, but I look forward to chatting with you this upcoming Friday. I will hold the time we have spent talking in that dimly lit room in a place of reverence in my heart. You are the literary heroes that I can laugh with. Thank you for making Duke, poetry, and everything that will come after special.

TCB (taking care of business),
Cosmo