

DREAM LANDSCAPES: A PERSONAL MYTHOLOGY

A Thesis by

Arturo Zilleruelo

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I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Master of Fine Arts with a major in Creative Writing.

Albert Goldbarth, Committee Chair

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Rick Mulkey, Committee Member

Peter Zoller, Committee Member

DEDICATION

To Erica

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.		
	dream landscape with wounded ziggurat	1
	dream landscape with wheatfield	4
	dream landscape with aerial grid	7
	dream landscape with organ farm	10
	dream landscape: westover disowned	13
	dream landscape with postapocalyptic surfer commune	16
2.		
	dream landscape: roswell, pennsylvania	17
	dream landscape: u.s.s. albacore	20
	dream landscape with sleepwalker	23
	dream landscape with potato famine	26
	dream landscape with cave murals	29
	dream landscape with screen memories	32
3.		
	dream landscape with wellwater	33
	dream landscape with subtle forces	36
	dream landscape with martyr poles	39
	dream landscape: zoological gardens	42
	dream landscape with aircrash	45
	dream landscape: our funeral	48

dream landscape with wounded ziggurat

1

when the rains came,
i hacked slabs from the sycamore
and passed the season naked,

sucking rootsaps within the ragged cavity.
i woke in dry summer
with my house come down around me

and a splinter up my backside.
i burned the dead
car and took to wandering, leaving

stain in the grass
behind me and packing my trouserseat
with sorrel and puddle water.

2

the grass went spotty,
then brown, then dead.
the sun burned clouds

down to atoms, and moonlight
froze my piss into disks,
which i sat on and cried.

stars rearranged themselves
nightly, and no people came into their stories.
now there was pus

and deeper pain, and woundwater
rolled down my legs
like egg-broth.

3

i came apart in the desert.
i gnawed my own hair
and the flaked skin

the sun burned from me.
i vomited infection,
and when thirst came

i bent to it.
with nowhere left
to go, i went.

with no reason
to walk
i kept walking.

4

i have fever memories of broken
stairs and stone.
i watched the ruddy

birth of now dead
stars from a pinnacle i cannot name.
the north melted, and i weathered

the flood half-swooning
atop a creaky radio tower.
i was bent and opened

and my affliction
was taken from me. some god with
black eyes touched my face.

5

some nights my wife wakes me and i know
i have dreamed the dream aloud,
have wept the awful

leaping of the priests from the summit spire,
have begged against the gods' departure
and the caesarian slice of their flight across the sky.

some nights it is i
who shakes my son awake and pulls the sticky
blanket from his crotch,

i who presses
cartoon band-aids to the bruises
at his temples.

6

when he says he knows
the stars, that they come to him in sleep and take him
to play on the tops of clouds,

i must strike him,
or his mother will
turn from me at night,

quiet and cold as a half-moon.
but when her fingers trace the scar of my healing,
she knows the trail to

my past is lost to her,
my bloodline forever
buried in sand and flood.

7

when i go to the hollow with leaves in my hand,
i pray thanks when they come away bloodless.
when they come away red,

i burn and bury them, and walk
into the woods with a mophandle
and a bucket of hot

coals from the fire.
tonight, when the world sleeps,
she will smear her

mouth with sycamore sap
and kiss me. let the leaves
listen, let the stars watch.

dream landscape with wheatfield

1
when the wind comes,
my father fishhooks
a tape recorder and casts

into the wheat.
some mornings we find him
face down in a bowl,

his headphones
crusted with oatmeal,
snoring over

sheafs of graph paper
covered in algebra.
years ago while searching

2
the shed for porno,
my brother and i
found a trunk

full of star charts
with music written over
all the constellations.

we snuck one
to our piano lesson
and asked ms. jacobs to play it:

it sounded like waves
shouting secret codes to one
another, while a jet engine sang overhead.

3
when i was twelve
we drove east
for a week at the beach.

i swam while my brother stoned jellyfish to death,
and my father half-
buried a coke bottle

to map its vibrations
with driftwood in the sand.
he composed movements

on the hotel's detuned piano,
and on the morning of our departure
he swam out to an island of dark

4
rock and slid
the notation
into a fissure.

today, as i watch him
fish the wheat for answers
to questions i won't ask,

i hear the wind in the field
hum the same song
as the ocean breaking rock

down to silts and sands, the same
magnet song the earth broadcasts
to submerge the rhythms

5
of its infancy
(those jellyfish, cast by unluck
onto the sand, my brother

whistling as he strides like divinity from the dead
to the living, crackling
air with the siren of his high hymn,

the music entering
flesh only seconds
before the stone).

soon, i'll suffer
handshakes at the airport
and rise into the music

6
of engines and torn
atmosphere, and my father
will drive home with darkness

whistling in
through his cracked windows.
at cruising altitude,

i'll slide the hatch up
and look out into the black
as it folds around

wing and fuselage,
into the starlight visiting
its indecipherable

7
code down
upon the wheatfields,
where wind chips away at the stalks

like water
at dark rock
in which forgotten

music lies
hidden, where someone's
flesh waits

untrembling
for the night to sing
its answers.

dream landscape with aerial grid

1

ten planes spat smoke from their ass-ends
and traced someone's property lines
across our airspace.

the sun surfaced,
and a checkerboard shadow
carved the city into hundredths

before the careful lines dispersed
and masked themselves as clouds.
now we walk in pairs,

two eyes up and two down,
hoping to sidestep verdicts
as we move through these unknowable territories.

2

we dream suggestions,
whispers rising from sewer grates,
symbols in the leavings

of the lawnmower,
rumors from each cardinal direction
of a shadow that bleeds

through earth and rock
and comes
to rest in dens

beneath our feet,
in the underplace
it stabs its flags into.

3

last night we all dreamed
the same dream: horizon
and lawn and catacomb all

nailed together
with the cruel geometries of airplane smoke,
half of us fallen away

into a rapture
through the sheets of our beds,
taken to a grid of steel and stone,

to a bed of plastic and bleach,
a surgery bay
where tissue learns

4
to let go of itself,
where skin weeps red goodbyes
to muscle and bone,

where pliers rip the pathetic umbilicus
binding eyeball to socket.
when we woke,

half of every bed was
empty beyond words,
and we ran to the streets

not looking up or down
but straight ahead,
forgetting what judgments

5
might manifest
to eat us. with time came calm and realization,
and we stood there

on the tarmac in our pajamas,
waiting for permission to write itself
in the clouds

or in the oily water
pooled in the potholes.
it never did, so under

cover of night
we crept home
to shiver till dawn with the lights on.

6
sometimes one of us
will wake returned,
swearing not to know

where the scars came from
or if the rest are still alive.
the sound of an airplane

engine will dilate their pupils;
they will slosh through puddles
or plough into filthy snowdrifts

to circumvent a manhole cover. the things
they say in sleep are secrets the stars
themselves have copyrighted.

7

today the planes are back,
laying their angles down
in smoke too precise

to be smoke.
those who still wake alone
walk through the math and the shadow,

kneeling at the corners
where rows and columns converge,
pressing their hands

down to the street-top,
waiting for the past to rise up
into the cold sun.

dream landscape with organ farm

1

the sparrow beneath the liver tanks
drags its beak through leakage
and steals a blade of fibreglass

to wrap around its eggs.
one of us will bin this nest before long
and wipe the crust

of dirt and yolk
and bird shit from his hands.
a curious hierarchy

of cells: the embryonic paste
on the gloves
of a caretaker,

2

himself a bag of guts
in the guts of a gut factory,
in this sterile hangar

where membranes are laid open
to the heresy of sex
without bodies,

where cells dream themselves
in half, where decisions
ignite furnaces

and fill vats with solutions
running arrogant
with thick clarity.

3

in the coffee room
just after cleanup,
the goofball synchronicity

of an egg sandwich
and a clot of yolk
gumming down my forearm's

peach fuzz. my skin
shone wet as the bedspread of tissue
paper, sticky as stray

feathers in straw:
i pulled my earplugs out tonight
and came up from the vault

4
shaking and choking back
puke, but i've signed
binding agreements and have forgotten

worse. what happens is,
paperwork descends
and we push

buttons. we know
what doors to walk past,
and we draw pretzel

sticks from a hat
to assign titty-vat duty
and dick-tank detail.

5
the male airlifting spiders
up to the female:
the bird analogue

to pickles and ice cream.
by shift change, he'll be back
with fresh twigs and whatever

birds get in place of hard-ons,
and surrounded by a thousand
immense buckets of meat and goop

these two tiny
buckets of meat and goop
will reassemble

6
their courtship,
the data inside their cells
wrapping around each other,

ribs around a heart,
feathers over skin,
sticks and dust and trash

around the egg-
bed of their nest.
like all forays

into the pathetic and fallacious,
this has sanitized their lives,
dreamt them cleaner and less

7
sinister than memory
suggests is prudent.
everything gets its paperwork

from somewhere.
on the tabletop,
a fingernail

crescent under
salt constellations,
floating

organs of divinity
in a galaxy
of dark formica.

dream landscape: westover disowned

1
not a city of the dead,
but a dead city,
sprawling its fatigue,

spitting out forests
of skyscraper shadows.
what eyes remain

to drink light's fall
from highrise windows,
to eat its death-rot,

its gush into a graph
upon the freeway's
four dimensions?

2
the stars drip age, their light
leaks like candle wax onto sidewalks
too old to flinch

as the day wakes
like worms into the concrete,
as the light breaks

like porcelain
on the surface of a puddle.
never again now the crow's

song of claiming:
rot come running to bury my hours,
rot to sing death to my hunger.

3
to walk the empty,
unwrecked wreckage of westover
is to walk

the senile orbit of a comet
or the corridors of a dead
god's brain

while the gutters
funnel rain
into retinues of white

owls diving, beaks
stretched to drink
disintegration as it rises.

4
but still no ghosts.
still the unlanguage of silence,
the black yolk of nightfall

a river of bandages,
obsolete now in the woundless world.
the flicker of a television

means nothing,
the water through the grate
means nothing, the stars constellations no longer,

and never again.
this ground, too holy for haunting,
breathes light and drinks rain.

5
not even in a dream
could this be real, and finally
the ghosts come, a host of analog

glitch, a tape-looped
pantomime of evaporated pasts.
the cabbie spits

his curse out now
and now again, the butcher
brings his blade down now and now

again. something in the sky
drags a schoolboy's eyes
up into the rewind

6
precincts of his afterlife, and the moon
hides half its face, the moon is complicit,
the moon golfs sundays with the judge.

the dead know every secret industry
but will not be bribed:
they flow like blood cells across

a melting stretch of interstate,
their jaws soldered
shut with threats,

eyes glued open
with animal truths,
falling blind

7

below the landing-lights
of impossible airships.
and there, in the pit

of a bowed clothesline,
the crow working something black
down his throat, his silent

song presiding
like starlight
over the new wreck,

not a dead city,
but a city
of the dead.

dream landscape with postapocalyptic surfer commune

my worst fears come true:
i am right about everything,
and the night breaks under lunar and stellar mandate,

oceans pour in through the fissures,
jellyfish wither the clouds with their glow.
on the beach among the dying, fires to eat the floating dead.

from the radio on the sand altar,
the brylcreem harmonies of the last surviving hymns
and the waves of static cresting out and out

into the breakers,
into the blonde bodies who chase
the future as it dies.

dream landscape: roswell, pennsylvania

1

the minty stink of birch forest burning,
and a pillar of smoke pooling
into black clouds,

recurring nightly
like a memory
trying to get born,

like a splinter of past
working its way up and out
through the tissues of a dream,

then wreckage and bodies, and me
in short pants looking down at the pieces.
just fragments

2

of a happening, but enough
to follow through to self-diagnosis:
i had seen, in the twisted, smoking

limbs of an aircrash's
aftermath, my own end reaching
back from an unknown day

to show me
its first face. i sent
inquiries to airlines,

drove out to hangar bays
where old men
smoke in derelict piper cubs,

3

but no one recalled anything
commercial or private
going down at that place,

at that time. i called the f.a.a. and got
hung up on, called back and got
transferred to nobody,

and my freedom-
of-information-act requests
came back blacked out,

top to bottom.
so i arranged for two weeks off.
family emergency, i said,

4
and dug out
my parka and hiking boots.
back in the birches,

snow met bark in blank
screens of possibility, and every cigarette
stretched its smoke

like a phantom
limb into the wind. at night,
i jerked off into the fire,

and smells of salt and soggy grass
rose and faded
with the ghosts of my dead sperm.

5
i went out there expecting to find
half a wing in a treetop
or a nosecone-shaped

hole in the ground.
what i found, while digging
in the snow for dead

leaves to wipe my ass with,
was a spot where no trees
would grow, where the smell of mint and smoke

brought memory falling
from the sky:
it wasn't death

6
i saw burning
in that pit torn
from a lost summer,

but life, reaching for me
with the wrong
number of fingers and issuing

decrees with lidless
eyes, all pupils,
directing me to drag it from the fire,

to point its head to
the north star
when night came.

7

it's easy to turn
present into past, and easier still
to make that past disappear:

i gave notice and drove
south on route 611
to philadelphia, and took a flat

in a noisy neighborhood within days.
now streetlamps and neon
outshine the starlight, and my ashtray

heaps with dead
cigarettes, burned up, breathed in,
blown out, forgotten.

dream landscape: u.s.s. albacore

1

at this depth we forfeit sound,
smothering coughs and taking
measured pisses into sawdust.

we're told little, but we know
our cargo doesn't exist on paper, and the captain
keeps a sealed envelope he's to open

only in the event of our detection.
we slide unknown through lightless water,
the hull declaring innocence in white script,

in the name of a fish whose flesh fills
the sandwiches of school lunches beyond numbering
up in some other world we used to know.

2

one night on a bored watch
i opened a torpedo tube
and found it packed with fibreglass

pouring pink glow into the blackness. for the next month
i came a dim mix of blood and sperm and dreamt a self-
portrait in x-rays, with constellations of bright

spots like punctuation in my brain.
soon after, a pod of narwhals sang mimicry
to our engines and swam us an awkward courtship.

they took us
for a bitch-god of their species and writhed
an orgy out on our bow, leaving

3

thick webs of essence
hanging through heavy miles.
we blasted jets of ballast,

came as close as we dared to surfacing,
but they followed,
spinning trails of fuck

long enough to seed whole oceans.
emptied finally, they left us
ghosting a ridge of ice

they feared to approach, and we took
turns at the periscope
watching their tusks crest the surface,

4
then diminish into distance.
we brushed a frozen
border, and the sonar

woke and wouldn't shut down;
it registered impossible
maneuvers below and above,

and we pulled it apart to unvoice
its beacon. that night
dreams descended on all of us,

and we woke with bruises
blooming on our temples and scoop wounds
only our own nails

5
could have dug
lining the flesh of our arms. the medics
passed out valium and the captain

consented to extra
rations, but sleep came reluctant and fevered.
the cook and the sergeant went missing

after a fuel rendezvous, and the closer
we drew to magnetic north
the thirstier the dreams grew.

when i dragged myself to the infirmary with a needle-
hole over my adam's apple, i found
a roomful of ensigns, throats

6
wrapped in bandages,
sweating their cots dark, then officers
hiding traumas under stubble or turtlenecks,

and finally the captain,
his neck a starfield of scabs, his crotch
dripping piss to the rust at his boots.

a lightbulb swung on a rope,
spilling glow into the puddles under each cot,
bleeding streaks into the fluid

like sun into oily water, like a nova star
reciting its death
to the pooled vacuum of space.

7

through the periscope
the moon drips jaundice,
stars hang like snowflakes in stasis,

and ice echoes evidence
in the mirror of its skin.
we're told little, but we know

what our scars can tell:
what never happens brands you
with its absence, and skin is the paper

upon which everything that doesn't exist
writes itself in flesh, an elegy
for some other world we used to know.

dream landscape with sleepwalker

1

in the winter of my thirtieth year
i stopped sleeping,
all at once.

diagnoses were inconclusive,
prognoses grim: voices and visions
after a week, seizures after two, and death

before the new year.
i telephoned my goodbyes,
poured a glass for myself and one for death,

and in the light of the open
fridge i waited for what
was coming to come.

2

when it got here i can't say,
and where my real life
ended and these dreams

began is a question
i've learned not to ask:
there is pain in dreams, and it knows you

more closely than waking
pain ever could.
it doesn't like being watched.

so when earth and sky
fuse i believe it,
when stars descend and owls

3

peer out from the portholes
i remind myself not to beg
when the beaks sink in.

i have seen the ghosts of lesser crows
chase water up a wellshaft,
i have wept reservoirs at the sublime

stasis of a world
abandoned by the living and the dead.
all of it happened.

the evidence is locked
inside the moon,
and the sky's empty organs

4

hold vigil in shifts: glowing
hearts and stomachs inking every
night with cathedrals of obscenity,

with comic strips i cannot
understand, with the heat of a hunger
whole worlds may die to satisfy:

matter knows itself and flees,
space dilates and tears, stars drip
hospital florescence to better see

what births itself through the cracks,
to better feed the gadgets of their blacklit
surveillance. here, in the stones at my feet,

5

and here, in the barren
flats of concrete pushing out to where
my vision can't follow,

is the record of my dreaming
in a language of shapes,
my new life cast

in found sculpture,
a curiosity for the bored beyond
bored and the rich beyond rich.

this is the new
world and i am its money,
a feast that can't die,

6

a joke that doesn't get itself.
i read my history on the borders of wall clouds
and recall none of it,

i hear in thunder
the rumors of my
disrepute and choke

back the denials:
in this place one deciphers
memory quietly or not at all.

and when the thing that burns
the skyline with the fumes
of its scandalous engines

7
hangs half-visible
behind clouds,
i bury

the memory
of its plans for me
even before i feel

myself lifted.
but i wake knowing
all of it happened.

the evidence
is locked
inside the moon.

dream landscape with potato famine

1
she lets me do it every way
for a pound of bacon and a stack of porksteaks.
i watch her stumble

over hacked soil and moonlight,
home to a husband who won't ask,
to a daughter who will wet her own holes

with grease before she comes to me herself.
i came to own these people
when the fields dried up

and the cropdusters disappeared into starlight:
now the dirt births nothing but stunted tubers,
and only the slaughterhouse yields harvest

2
enough to speak of.
skyward i see veins, not birch
branches, and what rises

to my nose from a parted behind
floods my mouth with the saliva of an hour at table,
while my own flesh gets itself

full of blood. my instruments are few:
axe for pigs,
sledge for cows,

ballpeen hammer for the occasional goat,
knives to gut and skin, hooks to drip the gashes dry.
chopping through tissue on the slab, i wonder

3
at what point a thing stops
being life and starts
being meat, but before

an answer can fall
from the stars, before i can
divine truth within the marbled

fat glazing the muscle,
somebody's niece pulls the doorchain,
and i take her in, take her coat,

take her dress, and stand her
against the wall,
eyes closed.

4

last month small men appeared in the fields
with canisters of pink
liquid and showed us

how to mix it with manure and oil,
then fold it into soil with rakes after a rainstorm.
they handed out maps of constellations,

showing us which ones
to shout our prayers to
and which ones not to look at

when the moon wanes. they warned that watching
their departure would undo our eyes,
so they sent us to bed when the time

5

came for starlight
to descend for them.
we all woke with wounded arms;

the men's balls ached
and the women bound their stomachs
with hot rags and pine sap.

my nose flooded
blood and mucus
into my beard;

both ears rang
if i looked the moon
full in the face.

6

the new week brought strange orders to my door:
girls wanting tripe and sweetbreads,
tongue, marrow, and eyeballs.

i came onto fingers, mouths,
feet, faces, hips and stomachs,
i staged whole orgies,

fucked mothers and daughters together,
had three sisters open their asses to me,
then lie in a glistening tangle

to catch my spill in their hair.
one night i washed in the stream
and watched the fields glow

7

with little pockets of growth
pushing through earth,
first wheat of a new season,

infant bread of a new world.
night fell cold on my nakedness;
water ran hard past my skin.

tonight my doorchain
hangs silent, and my meats
grow fuzzes and molds on the wet slab.

outside, dirt glows
pink under starlight, and the moon
sticks like a scalpel in the flesh of the night.

dream landscape with cave murals

1
under the rot,
under the hard molds,
a veiled history in paint,

long pain of a drowned culture
mortared over with growth:
city-fires rendered with red clay

suspended in marrow,
plague scars with petals
steeped days in a broth of tallow and lichen,

vague machines hanging between stars,
dripping the pink of blood and semen
bound in ovarian jelly.

2
gimcrack aesthetic in crude lines:
a stick-antelope speared and splayed
in a pool of itself,

a stick-huntress,
each breast's madcap circumference
threatening to sunder the stick-body.

what birth-truths hang
in the cradle scribbles of a species,
what narrative of breakage and leakage

lies tied to wet walls
in lightless galleries,
in the folds of a black scab where the earth tore open?

3
here, under sheeted green ice,
a man is the opened animal,
viscera glistening wet,

arms stretched up and out
to a pitiless cluster of stars,
absurd erection

gushing his gift
to the moon's halo,
his discharge a fountain

ripping ragged through heaven
in the strokes of a hand
too shaky to keep the brush true.

4

and here, in a high circle,
ministers of surgery,
black pits of their eyes drinking the white flood,

engines of their carriage
scarring the sky pink.
unknowable and untellable,

this picturebook nightmare
sleeps like a beacon
in the world's body:

analog data implanted in matter,
the fleshless made carnal,
approximate soul incarcerated in deepest tissue.

5

the wasp-worm,
hatched in the guts of a caterpillar,
turns its mouth-hole

to the walls of its womb
and sucks, twisting its clotted
mass in spasms,

working its way
up and out through the tissues,
up and out through the thick skin ripping,

to hoard pain in the bag of its body,
to pack life down its gullet,
to show the truth of itself to the sunlight.

6

when the moth wakes
frozen to the leaf,
and the early frost

unseats the wing,
and the thin antenna
crumbles into crystal,

and the legs fall
fused into hard knots,
and the thorax goes on

sucking air:
how sweet to breathe the midday melt,
to drown in the afternoon!

7

after an age,
after the long melt,
when the frozen world falls to flood,

the pilot of a wrecked bark
will crawl into a fissure
where the sun can't follow

to look upon an old world
hungry as the new,
to finger his patchwork of scars,

to lean his head
in sleep against
his story as it burns.

dream landscape with screen memories

raw data tore me out of bed and gave me to the stars,
and i watched the city process lives
like some ancient computer

while owls drank themselves
woozy on the humid drama of human souls.
up there, the sickle of moon threatened surgery,

and what i prayed was lightning
or a ball of cryptic weather
wrote memos in the sky,

branded my sight with indecipherables,
and locked my memory
in the hallways of its engines.

dream landscape with wellwater

1

he takes her there on the hillside,
both bodies shivering in wet grass,
and all she brings to his sex

comes away bloody:
handpalm and footsole, white belly
where his own whiteness fountains.

he runs naked and weeping to the well,
leaves her pinned by starlight to a crest of ruptured flowers
atop a couch of blood and dew,

heaven watching like a thirsty pupil,
deep well of eager vision,
black crown of attentive dimension.

2

in padlocked vatican archives,
grainy handheld footage:
our lady of fatima

birthing a three-mouthed godthing
on a bed of dead militiamen,
entire navies of discs hovering in attendance.

leaves fall flaming,
mothers kneel on smoking stone
fingering rosaries and wailing for their daughters,

forgotten gospel in pictures,
zaprunder beatified,
divinity housed in decayed frames.

3

at a five-dollars-a-head basement lecture
we watched three forensics professors
feed the headshot into spatial imaging software,

rendering black all but the cranial matter:
pixelated flesh glowing white,
flowering out,

a starfield of digital tissue
reconstituting as the footage rewound,
egg reshelled,

apple unbitten,
universe fallen to infancy
in the pictures of gravity's dream.

4

father ignacio luna smelled flowers
as he woke in strange light,
flowers in smoke

rising black from the hillside,
flowers on the hot wind
falling into fog,

flowers as he told the policía
how angel-hosts descended on discs of cloud and flame
to lift a bleeding body,

how the dark ribbons sprayed from each wound,
raining redemption
down to ruined ground.

5

the object of conjecture
hangs over the deck of the u.s.s. john f. kennedy,
its stillness a flag mocking gravity,

its silence a bootcamp chant
taunting physics to chance explanations,
relieving every crewman of the luxury of doubt.

tonight the boatswain's mate
will whisper to his son of white light
blooming from a disc,

will trust him not to listen,
not to remember,
not to believe.

6

every six months
miss mary priestley,
retired gentlewoman farmer,

receives a substantial sum
from an unknown party
for storing beneath the dirt-

floor of her barn
a child-sized casket,
a bucket of burned leaves,

and a stack of blue film canisters
corroded with red rust
and black mold.

7

he drags himself up that flowered incline,
one arm cramping rope-veined
against the earthward pull of the bucket,

water unfurling,
rusthole to grass,
clear flying banner of gravity's brag.

he finds no mouth to wet,
no wounds to wash,
so stands unmanned,

face to the stars,
searching their number
for a new constellation.

dream landscape: recurring abduction

1

deer coupling on moonlit airstrips,
taxis abandoned at crossroads,
fuzzy dice dangling like glands from the rearviews.

confirmed sightings, switchboards blinking pink protest and martyrdom,
halfhearted mobilizations of the somewhat prepared.
i watch an anchorman resign on-air,

watch myself dismantle phone jacks,
feel myself lifted to a disc of assembled starlight.
this, my passage through familiar underholes;

i'm a yawning wallet
pouring out penalties of birth debt
to a surgery i never elected.

2

you who have never swallowed
the rising stink of your own punctured abdomen
or watched unknowable stars through eyes unsocketed

or gagged furies
over the shaft of an esophageal probe
or felt lodged within membranes of sinus

cold spheres of pyramid eye
or died from the pain and woken up still on the table
you who have never known

flight from the meat of yourself
down into a soul of meat a soul they can rend and catalogue:
remember your place in dirge country, and mouth no doubt to me.

3

best man, drunkest man, i dropped the microphone into the cake.
sing the crow alighted on a birch branch, sing the blue light and the orange.
my shoelace comes undone, but again this intersection, again this hour?

the backyard's rhubarb crop a shock of skunk cabbage,
three vertebrae swelling bleachbone through skin,
my cat in the paint bucket striped white as cartoons.

in dreams i know the hand that sculpts weak jokes from human life.
its nails drip the ink of evil maths.
dicks grow skinless where the droplets fall to earth.

the sun an angry infection,
the moon a bloated czarina.
when i was young i witnessed the televised suicide of a disgraced congressman.

4
got shaky, got referrals, got regressed,
remembered being
floated off the brooklyn bridge at rush hour,

sucked through the ceiling of an opera house,
pulled from my locked office,
spirited from board meetings,

withdrawn from the boston marathon,
ripped untimely from my mother's womb,
led from washrooms at wedding receptions,

slipped off barstools,
taken at the ready from fertility clinic collection chambers,
torn from bed as i sprayed my empty crisis.

5
six officers in snowy boots in black forest in navyblue.
human meat pushing up through dead ordnance,
pits gaping, gagging on secrets.

i have left my body in dreams and learned this:
beneath every city lies a buried heart, fleshed enormity
ratcheting blood through railtubes a thousand feet under,

each beating clot mouthed and toothed,
eats missing persons eats political dissidents,
eats trainyard vagrants eats body and ghost.

what woods are left to get lost in,
what river can carry you
past tributaries of the grand dossier?

6
yesterday i dared the city;
pity drove me to touch a sick wound leaking rust,
now i am afraid to touch my mouth, my sex, my anything.

i know the real color of my insides,
as does the moon, drunk as she is on heart's data,
locked as she is with mad atoms.

i offered the driver of a taxicab
all the contents of my billfold
to drop me at a hospital;

he cursed me
with the false violence of the surveilled
and left me crying under a lamppost.

7

kitchen and bedroom
become unknown provinces,
simple utensils, vague artifacts,

the body itself a borrowed suit,
too much room in the waist,
the fabric a starched, stained irritant.

what alien smell ghosts your breath
now, here, under pink sheets hot with fever,
atop a mattress contoured to someone else's shape,

below the blurred disc of a ceiling fan,
above the quiet catastrophe
of bloodspots on the pillowcase?

dream landscape with martyr poles

1
the intimate
horror of aftermath, the blackened fat
smeared in streaks

down wood
made transcendent by facsimile:
these martyr poles stand

like a forest of ghosts.
i haul my belly and breasts
from ashpile to ashpile,

thinking somehow
that i'll know him when i find him,
that the movement in my womb

2
will wake
when the flesh i took
inside me lies

heaped at my feet.
i can feel, even through
the curtain of smoke

the airplanes put down,
the moon radiating gloat
from its cold vantage, the starlight

stabbing down
like a bent grin through the sky.
these bodies

3
work their math
on mine, my blood
shifting like tides

in the tenure
of gravity. ash can't own
what i carry, and i don't

even own myself:
my scars look like letters,
and my undercotton

glows pink
when i remember him
with my fingers.

4
mushrooms cluster
at the bases where the wood is softest.
their meat tastes of smoke

and sugar and makes my milk
run yellow and thick.
i have eaten dirt, clay,

pine needles,
eggshells, and once,
my body shaking

with want,
a clot of char stuck
half-melted to a noose.

5
i have lifted
my own breasts to my mouth and sucked
myself dizzy

with milk and memory,
while stars fell
like camera flashes, and blood

scraped like radio
static past the nerves of my ears.
my nights hang

ripe with fathers and instruction,
my armpits heavy
with gathering lymph.

6
fire has singular
purpose and happiness:
flames know nothing of grief

or guilt, everything
of hunger and spread, of touching
other small flames to life,

of eating and dying.
i will feed
my body on all the earth

until this small
life leaves it, and then my drowsy end,
my pillow of ash.

7

late this morning.
i knew him by the ring
he still sleeps curled around,

by the small flood
running down my legs.
there is a world left to burn,

but now i am
empty, now there is a ring
to swallow, now

the ghost of burning
hides our wedding
from the stars.

dream landscape: zoological gardens

1
winter, and it is clear
to even the most primordial of these caged
awarenesses that the keepers are not

coming back.
at ground level, snow wears
bruises: the discharge of what's

alive enough to spray
territories no one will ever
threaten again. motion

here is aberration,
and the moon
drags its bulk through

2
snowstorms of stars,
not bothering to watch the wolf
bend to wolf-meat or the elephants

exhume their dead and tusk at them clumsily.
the bodies of the starving
shrink under starlight,

under skyborn
intrigues bleeding through
time, seeding worlds

with glow and painting
black space white with
reports of last diminishment.

3
the snow thrives
well enough. it erects monuments to itself
with dead matter at the foundations.

it marries itself
to the plexiglass
borders of the seal cage,

to the contours of the plastic
water slide someone once
bought for the otters.

hard to say if the snow knows
the world it has buried.
hard to say

4
how long until
speaking of this world and the snow
as if they aren't the same thing

becomes an exercise
in nostalgia: scattered
beneath the drifts,

little nodes of blue
light blink their final
beacons as the generators

fail, and no one
else with memory
enough to mark

5
the magnitude of their departure
remains to witness.
soon, everything

that can eat will have eaten
everything, and snow
will fall unknown

to all but itself.
life and death
will serve

the terms of their perjury
beneath the glass of dead
wristwatches, and i

6
will freeze to death
less than halfway across
the passage from here

to the moon.
but for now, this dream
still owns me,

and there is dying
to do and witness
to bear. i go under

the snow to sing the wasted
ribs of the jaguar,
the broken

7

beaks of the swan
and the penguin.
they meet

their peace silently,
fixing themselves to stillness
to catch the song echoing

down to them
through the frequencies
of a dream, through

the emptiness that hides
like a promise
between the flakes of fallen snow.

dream landscape with aircrash

1
as with so much,
there is nothing to this
but debris: molten

plastic cooled
into semispheres, a dot
matrix of glass shards,

gobs of metal
twisted into the alphabet
of disaster. while agents

in overcoats huddle
around a geiger counter
nodding and scratching

2
stubble, bodies
lay in rows
on the field's edge,

each twisted into a character
from some perverse,
illegal calligraphy.

two miles away
the story writes
even less of itself:

a tower of greasy smoke
with a foundation of flame, and a traffic
copter hovering like a bee

3
over the crater of a lightning
strike. the sky will be curious
tonight, the stars will bend

light hard and sharp
onto the smoldering
document below. whatever eyes

hold the dead
within their darkness will drink
this rubble

into the inkwells of their memory,
into a stenographic
shorthand curving through

4
spirals of loss,
as the pain published
on the skin of the torn world dreams

itself a bestseller.
when the families
gather over sherry

to cry, it will be
under cover of storm,
with thick curtains

on windows and no cameras
allowed, and they will
scribble their comfort to one another

5
in the margins of paperbacks.
but now day hangs pale, clouds
filter out sunlight's bones,

the counter coughs out
static like an omen, and only the dead
have read reports of their deaths.

people are arranging
silverware and setting
bottles out to breathe.

wives are slipping into
more comfortable somethings.
it has happened,

6
but the happening is the ghost of the phone
call, of the knock that stops
the clock and the world's

revolution, of the doorbell that overtures
the mourning decades. entire
worlds are lies now: the sky keeps its cold

secrets. this heap of fragments,
this pit of untranslatable
forfeiture in the end

tells nothing except
its own vanity, its own history,
the moments of its birth

7

into awareness and the breakage
of that which joins
atom to atom and body

to pain. the stars
polish their spectacles, the fire eats
its own body transparent,

the tower of smoke
collapses: worlds ended
today, and worlds will end

tomorrow, and as every world
ends it reads itself in the rhythms of its birth-tongue,
in the shapeless scripts of its own body.

dream landscape: our funeral

no children,
no mourners,
no procession

of crows and circular shadows.
only our lawyer,
tramping through a field

with a hand-drawn
map and two parcels,
stopping in the shadow of an oak

to dig, to unfold and upend,
to pack the dirt down hard
over our last bed.