

STATE HOUSE CALENDAR

Mairéad Byrne

The Rhode Island State House in Providence is a magnificent & totally unlikely building, beached on Smith Hill under huge skies. I see it every day when I drive from my home in Mount Pleasant to the East Side of Providence where I work. For 13 months in 2004-2005, I recorded my first glimpse of it every morning: the color of the stone against the color of the sky. At the end of each month, these daily notes became a poem.

It was a time when I had no time—a way of snatching poetry where I could. I made the notes while driving; sometimes my daughters wrote them down. Rounding the corner from Chalkstone to Smith was a moment of great attention for us. One morning we hit Smith and—*no State House!* It was obliterated by fog.

Even though I was intent on color, it's worth mentioning that I always wore sunglasses! I tried to take a photo of the State House afterwards & was amazed how tangled up in telephone wires & traffic it was. I was able to handle light better with words than with a camera.

These poems are by no means the Rhode Island State House's only claim to fame—it is the fourth-largest self-supporting marble dome in the world. Also, it has an 11' tall gold-covered Independent Man on the top.

The brackets signify a second observation on any given day. July is short because I went away.

STATE HOUSE, SEPTEMBER

candle-flame against turquoise
pearl against lavender
mint against rose
breast-milk on mauve
metal against mackerel
yellowed lace on watered silk
graphite on glass
silhouette on pale blue
eggshell on streaked blue
grey cut-out against sky-blue
velcro on azure
cupped flame on indigo
old snow on cerulean
gravestone on cobalt
sepulchre white against Ascension Day cloud
mausoleum white against Renaissance cloud
light slate against milky cloud
soft white on white
dove-grey against white
old bone against smoke
thumbprint in smoke
dead bone on dirty wool
haze on fog
lemon pith on light grey
ivory on blue-grey
rosé against blue-grey
spooky grey on grey
graphite on glass
mauve against ash
shadow on shade

SEPTEMBER 2009

S M T W T F S

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STATE HOUSE, OCTOBER

soft chalk against sheer blue
gazebo against cloud terrace
apricot kernel beneath soaked sky
lemon-tea stain against cracked cup
[knuckle against wool]
smegma against lint
shaving against mucilage
stale oatmeal against gruel
soap against spray
spray against smoke
beacon against cartoon sky
buttercup under soft chin
conch against inky sea
coral against purple glaze
[pink against purple]
[rose against dove]
[rose against stilly light]
[something luminous against something radiant]
diffusion against saturation
stolidity against fluff
pallor against nausea
ache against unease
pain against tumult
[impassivity in the face of failure]
endurance against onslaught
acceptance against judgment
[weariness against perturbation]
gesture against readiness
statement against trauma
vapor against steam
hiccup against grand plan

OCTOBER 2009

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STATE HOUSE, NOVEMBER

blur against haze
slate against glaze
[fuzz against gauze]
calm against calm
ash against cloud
milk against cup
[palm against brow]
bone against flux
wet newsprint on flock
web against sheen
hemp against smoke
lit paper about to explode
thumbnail against lens
smudge against lens
lens against cloud downsweep
faint green on cloud tumble
grass stain against apricot
stance against drift
incipience against skepticism
biscuit against cornflower
powdered stone against metal
ink surge in tumbler
pale gold against inky cloud
[pallor against slab]
pallor against oblivion
back against wall
something against nothing
vertical against horizontal
fingertip against nape
touch against skin

NOVEMBER 2009

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STATE HOUSE, DECEMBER

dead tooth against factory smoke
grey shade on striated blue
white on grey
sleet against ice
haze on fog
[cupped votive lamp against soft slate]
[cupped votive lamp against ink]
nougat against light sky with cloud puffs
[pineapple on chiffon]
[pith against gauze]
[tallow on gauze]
shade against light
smoke against smoke
verdigris against fog
[lit skull on wet ink]
worn dime against storm clouds
[sky blue behind ivory]
slate against chiffon
[chalk against gauze]
thumbprint on cold paper
light grey on pale blue
almond on milk
hatching on watered silk
deep shadow against dense steam
shale against smoke
orange pith against dove grey
pineapple on pearl grey
shop bread in gruel
tallow against fleece
still grey against scumbled grey
mauve on tangerine tint

DECEMBER 2009

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STATE HOUSE, JANUARY

cupped palm over white flame against navy sky
chimney stack smoke behind old enamel
lilac against battleship grey
green-grey against soft-grey
marshmallow against mauve tint
tangerine tint against steam
whipped cream against tangerine
dove-grey on sky-blue banded with rose cloud
chalk against clear white banded with purple cloud
mink on mist
frost against down
fog on fog
[cloud in fog]
one cold thing against another
alabaster against snow field
peppermint against cement
cement against pulp
grey velour on white enamel
bone against grey-blue
salted concrete against rose & grey
shell on thin blue
faint yellow against pale blue
[urine on snow]
sweat stain against collar
nicotine against fluff
scissored edge against drained blue
loaded grey against washed turquoise
shadow against fugitive blue
[smoke against turquoise]
charcoal against pale blue
silhouette on milky glass

JANUARY 2010

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31

STATE HOUSE, FEBRUARY

dense appliqué on transparent blue
[wedding cake on sheer blue]
[stark white against blue psych]
[rose against faded blue]
grey-blue against incandescent white
[marble with sky-blue & cloud-scarf]
khaki against suffused grey
soft blue against blue veil & rose sash
beaten egg-white against blue ice
blueberry in milk
[jade against peach]
flame against chiffon
cobalt against apricot fuzz
[yellowed page against rose]
ochre on cloud-banded blue
dirty chalk into cloud
[alabaster against radiant blue]
soft marble against mauve cloud
amber against cobalt
[lemon against flame]
[white gold against sky blue]
loaded shadow on blue swell
river-ice on light grey
[soft white against soft grey]
impasto on frothy grey
[mink on lint]
[iced almond on smoked glass]
locked grey against Guinness foam

FEBRUARY 2010

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STATE HOUSE, MARCH

sand on smoke
soft lead against streaming & tossed cloud
[mint against cloudy cloud]
putty against pale wash
sable against sky-blue
fine wool against silk
stained cotton on snow
felt against fleece
bronze on steel
foam against spray
[margarine against haze]
[margarine against dishwater]
swept grey on pale blue
eye-white against purple-bitten cloud
airforce blue against pale blue
hatching on glass
ash on denim
card against cloud
clipped shadow on glass
buttercream against steam
cocoa butter against mesh
[lemon ice against dishwater]
burnt umber against blue glass
bone against bruised vein
eraser on smudge
cotton swab on grime
[beige on beige]
stone against violet
dust on enamel
shell against bleached blue
[new flame against massy blue]

MARCH 2010

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STATE HOUSE, APRIL

brushed grey against tumbled grey
anonymous grey against palest grey
smoky grey against pale glass
blue haze against grey
[blue mesh against pale grey]
[blue mesh against light grey]
[blue mesh against white-grey]
[blue smoke against smoke]
cream feather against hopeless grey
blue-white against blue-grey
[milk-blue against silver-grey]
powder blue against memory of blue
startling blue against mauve cloud
[wild cotton against rose-grey]
butter against rose
faint rose against palest blue
[palest blue with rose tint]
[light yellow against suffused grey]
saffron against scumbled cloud
cascading yellow against plunging cloud
marble against fog
sable against fur
fuzz on mist
green-grey against steam
dove-grey against milky cloud
[cobweb against metallic cloud]
[leaning tower beneath glowering cloud]
cucumber slice against Himalayan peak
mirage against milky screen
brush-mark on watered silk

APRIL 2010

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STATE HOUSE, MAY

yellowed grey against poured grey
sedate grey against white computer screen
brushed grey against scrambled light
[marshmallow against cream soda]
lard against fleece
[soap against suds]
tea-stain against dirty suds
tea-stain against snow
nylon stocking against grimy swab
brushed shadow on porcelain
shadow on dust-bowl
blue shadow on glass
[settled dust against open window]
fist against threat
[indifference against threat]
[flinch against threat]
[candy in the palm of a child about to cry]
[forbearance against despair]
[moon against electric cloud]
[bone against cloud]
splintered tooth against racked cloud
[beacon against storm clouds]
ermine against snow
ermine against fuzz
fur against cotton
mink in fog
white smoke against smoke
[bared belly against rumped comforter]
feather against metal
church candle against cloudy ink
sandwich in church buffet

MAY 2010

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STATE HOUSE, JUNE

brush stroke against stipple
moth-wing against paint
[despair against nonchalance]
blur against comprehension
blur on haze
sigh against pillow
wrinkled bedsheet on cloud hammock
skein against wool
old silver against glass pane
chamois against old iron
chipped cup among cloud suds
vanilla ice against perfect blue
polished white against smoky blue
soft blue against pale sky
soft flame against apricot froth
incandescence against varicose blue
bluish white against old rose
dove breast against blue veil
glance against equanimity
ash against white ash
dust on milk
chalk smear on grey screen
grey breast against blue sky
beacon against purple swathe
pearl drop on bruised mantle
yellow cream against fog
[yellow cream against spray]
[sobriety against morning]
[blessing against finality]
[old head on stark pillow]

JUNE 2010

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STATE HOUSE, JULY

shining white on pearl-grey
turquoise against hazy blue
blue ash against clear blue
soft chalk against powder blue
radiant white beneath glazed cloud
whipped cream against froth
splash against pennant
white balloon against grey spray
butter yellow against toppled blue
thin blue against piled cloud
yellowed edge against blue billows

JULY 2010

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STATE HOUSE, AUGUST

torn shadow on blank white
blue glaze on heavy white
slate against falling down white
presence against white noise
dust bunny on meringue puffs
dust against smoke
hemp against cotton
tobacco against cotton
béchamel against pulled cotton
melting candle-wax on brushed cotton
old button against flock
amber against lilac
enamel on formica
pearl against blue polished stone
tide-mark against bluestone
something poured on something backing away
resignation against cowardice
blessing before absolution
breath against gust
last smudge on erased page
incense smoke against steam
bleached linen against steam
stone against fleece
alabaster in cloud cauldron
charcoal against blue pennant
mouse fur against glass
marine blue against whale
shale in foam
froth against mist
[spume against drift]
dab against onslaught

AUGUST 2010

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STATE HOUSE, SEPTEMBER

retraction against foreboding
metal lid over blue-glazed plate
blue fingernails lilac clouds
scallop shell under floating cloud
scorched paper under slung smoke
sun-leap over madeleine
sunshine on a pale wall
petal on well water
readiness at first light
red-gold against glassy blue
shiny white against abalone
candle wax on rose
orange ice against faded denim
ice-green against shining floes
dab against fervent blue
silver against grey
ermine against gauze
fur against mold
resignation against saturation
arthritis against glaucoma
cataracts on milky eyes
smooth palm on upper arm
palm against lint
plaque against swollen vein
exhaustion against anxiety

SEPTEMBER 2010

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Warm thanks to the editors of the *Argotist Online*, *Effing*, *Litter*, *Masthead*, and *One Less*, where eight of the poems were first published, some in slightly different forms. And to my darling daughters Marina and Clio, who took notes.

