

NASCENT

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The poems in this book use titles quoted
from Cormac McCarthy's novel *Blood
Meridian* as inspiration and driving force.

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He began to speak with a strange urgency of things.

I go out and never in, mind adrift—
embankments of bilious white
like feathers ripped from breasts,
like beds inside beds—

my hands gnarled as old machines.
Last night the owl 'twas low and moaned
filled the space of my restiveness with
death's black margin.

My lips stutter
into clunks and mutters.
Say, say, the will to say.
Around this day, all the days
strewn about like dirty clothes.

Somewhere,
A thousand birds
deny their constancy
and leave this season
for another.

Somewhere, our intentions
and somewhere
everything—
just think of it all.

*The man who believes that the secrets of the world are
forever hidden lives in mystery and fear.*

I will tell you about the birds—
the hunting birds
and the nut birds
the birds who leave
and those who stay.

And here is the silver bird—
mercury in air—
and the red bird who comes
only in winter when the snow
makes of it a wound
and a holiness.

It makes no difference if you know
their names; they do not
know them either.

Call them the birds of discernment
and the birds of sorrow
the birds of blackest malice
or brightest beckoning.

Their bones are hollow—
their blood is cold.

They require emptiness
to place themselves—
cannot discern clear
glass from sky.

Without them
there is silence
and nowhere
to impale your desires,
but the songs they sing
lodge in your ears
like tiny sharpened
knives.

*He sees a parricide hanged in a crossroads hamlet and
the man's friends run forward and pull his legs and he
hangs dead from his rope while urine darkens his
trousers.*

To kill the father is a crime—
dance, they said,
but he preferred
to pray.

How little we know of ourselves
until the animal convenes.
We could cast our vagaries
in shawls of silk, build shrines
from stolen teeth.

And yet, thirst compels
the stuttered tongue
and so it started all again,
washing the water
with the water.

When she arrived,
her hands felt the evident
loss of invocation—wasted
flesh that dangled from a need.

They wrapped their hands
in ropes of hair,
licked the rank salt
from his body.

They did this that they might begin anew
and bring the body to the body once again
like a woman might possess herself—
each hollow full of other,
the taste of a man
dying slowly in her mouth.

*The sun to the west lay in a holocaust where there rose
a steady column of small desert bats and to the north
along the trembling perimeter of the world dust was
blowing down the void like the smoke of distant
armies.*

To this

I add your face as it

Registers dawn.

That I see you that I am near.

That your pulse is the steadiness

by which I gauge the air.

This air, that blows down the

void.

To the void I add my hands, empty

as wings

spread

to catch
the plume

of night's last burning.

*... and the horse was watching, out there past men's
knowing, where the stars are drowning
and whales ferry their vast souls through the black and
seamless sea.*

On the coast we rode, night
was so dark you could
believe you weren't alive
and the ocean heaved against it
like a patient in a cage.

We stopped in parking lots to check
the tide while sea lions lurched
and old men tied their lines—

you with your bottle-brine—
deaf to the tin horn of the boat,
the clanging buoy—
you blew away, helium
over water, teasing the teeth
of the waves, while beneath you
the black, reek devastation.

What the ocean wants
is everything—
I, too, need such salt
upon my tongue.

The waves lift, the waves
descend, dragging
your body along the shoals
and no way to mend the ruin.

There is a decorous measure to
loss once the body leans
into the grave of its own longings,
shrill as blue water, infinite mirror.

Ocean, ocean.
eat the past away like acid.
If this is the wash,
wash us wholly down.

Have mercy on me. Todos Muertos. Todos.

What do we owe the dead
aside from living—our names
etched in the paper remnants
of their skin like a map of the future.

Here, it diagrams oblivion—
snowfields of nothing
in this temporary winter,
in this rich, eternal spin.

I wish to capture something
in my palm and keep it—
a ghost of light, the shape
of shadow as it moves through
distortion—you, among the
trees, your white face whiter
for the blackness of sky,
like a tundra swan
curving the bend of land
around its body.

To be is to be
blinded in a white-
wash of signals,
discerning the edge
of this opaque,
imagined world.

*What's he a judge of? He said.
What's he a judge of?
What's he a judge of.*

Candles, thick and squeamish,
make black shadows dance
along the contours
of your skin.

You would have me
kneel through the streets
tell the earth's uncaring
ear my least transgression.

Spun from the fronds of
spring, the inner workings
of a worm, budded there
robe-red as a womb,
gold-scented—you
would be this woman
faithful to the last because
believe, believe in the eyes
that see, the eyes
that count your mercy
and your sin.

I have lost the stem
of this flower, I have
dropped the calm, cool
palm of the saint
who led me in.

The large ear holds my
evidence. I am nothing
but a bird, a seed,
a storm's recurrent slip of wind.

*... the moonblanched waste lay before them cold
and pale and the moon sat in a ring overhead
and in that ring lay a mock moon with its own
cold gray and nacre seas.*

One metaphor inside another—
a cup in a cup in a cup and a ball.

Inside the bed is an old woman
worried to thread by equally
old hands. Inside her clothes,
beast & tooth & fur.

The ground is built on shifts—
it heaves its great uncertainty
and after this, what then, what then.

The girl arrives, seduced
and swallowed by a lie.
Call the man with the knife,
slit out and out— the crone,
the girl—the squeamish mess.

What is real, what false,
sand or oyster, host or guest?
The moon a mere reflection
of the sun.

Inside the woman
more women—
inside of them
how many men?

*In a night so beclamored with the jackal-yapping
of coyotes and the cries of owls the howl of that old
dog wolf was the one sound they knew to issue from
its right form, a solitary lobo, perhaps gray at the
muzzle, hung like a marionette from the moon
with his long mouth gibbering.*

When you entangle yourself
in the wires, still the show goes on—
the orbital data of a small universe,
congruent only in the jagged angles
we assemble and convert.

I can count on my hand the times
I have inhabited it, held its succor
in my teeth, felt the dirt-mouthed
love of consummation.

I house possibility in the black blood
that issues isochronal in the moon's
full reclamation, but it is not enough
to brighten anything.

The branches still augur the air,
a hieroglyph of limit
and its limitlessness,
like the desert, all that orange—
its acres of airplanes parked
on endless, glistening tarmac
under a sun that forgives nothing,
remembers nothing—our woven
resentment gathering among
the low clouds of capital.

*He walked all night and still he could see the fires
behind him.*

This is a treatise on the past.

When I opened the window
no birds flew in,
yet the properties
of glass remained
a tunnel to the sky.

Life is a series of exiles
First, the body.
Last, the body.
The dress lost
its pleating,
the dog ran away.

Yet the sun was
a maddening orange. It said,
Come to the night with a patch on your eye.
Come to the sea with a hand-sewn sail.

The dog returned
with bleeding paws
trailing the scent
of what it had known—
old boxes, paper ruins.

Time remained—
remains—
directional
and linnets eat the flax
from which the linen's made.