

He would appear central in her book then go off
on his own meanwhile no one but themselves
in the kitchen's recessed lighting in their underpants

Drinking warm beer not taking calls
she had no idea who was calling kept calling
ringing in the emptiness

I know how you feel he lied I know you do
she lied but to listen just to listen tantamount
to forgiveness it did not matter for what

The longer one lived the less to forgive

The air changed around them her face
betrayed her face she thought more about before
when not much was more than enough
a pair of cutoffs on a salvaged couch

They wore the scent of smokers then

He rode in front He said nothing She drove
He looked out over the water as they crossed the bridge

It was all but dark he took a pen out of his shirt pocket
and wrote something down
he cared not to share with her

Her bags had not been in anyone else's possession

Her bracelets set off the metal detector

On the moving sidewalk she studied his back
through its thin cloth

Him with the scar do not think him healed
(so the proverb warns)

A funnel of feelings about going anywhere
 during a war

 Are your ears popping
trying to make light talk his half-delineated face
already in twilight the batting pouring
 from clouds below

Were you ever told the soul detaches from its earthly body
 at around 40,000 feet

If they handed you the black box
 what would you bequeath

 trying to make light talk

He slept with the dead then nothing roused him
Did she mention a missing spleen had she warned him
she shaved down there the night before

One glimpse of the paper was too much
the number of their dead to remain unknown

So the sleepless one hectored the sleeper

About the other night I know you are sorry I am sorry too We
were tired Me and my open-shut-case mouth You and your clock-
work disciplines And I know it is too far to go But we can't leave it to
the forces to rub out the color of the world

What is said has been said before

This is no time for poetry

When the laborer picked up the statue of the santo
he heard a fluttering and picked a petal off his arm

If the shoes of children are good luck
what about the boots of a brown-eyed soldier

In his hut the old man loved the mystique of radio
it took him somewhere irreligious and refrigerated

If they come here he told the much younger woman Keep still
make yourself small make yourself smaller

Posing to look proud on the old burro
though his mounts had always been thoroughbred

Asked if she had a memory of the camphor-drenched gown
hung as netting above the matrimonial hammock

Not really she said I know I wore it once
on the other side al otro lado and I was smaller then

I have the grey-blue eyes of my gachupín forebears
but don't take me for one of them

Then: on a certain night and no other
another telegenic war begins.
Can you describe this.
I cannot. This is not the day or the hour.
The color is all wrong.

What dreams I had.
You too.
We were going the speed of night.
We were riding black dogs.

So? What?
So. I don't know.

A plane set down under a bowl of blueness against a ragged ridge.
The old Zapotec town aroused by the onset of evening. The shuttle
bus rumbling from airstrip to zocalo. Swallows silhouetted, then bats
against sporadic streetlamps. Lilt of children. Dogs barking at exhaust
pipes. Passport of origin jostled out of mind. Unlit stairs. A worn lobby
off a keyed-up corner. Walls colored by water from a tank of angel
fish, the same

ghoulish glow from a muted

TV.

Civilian limbs sticking out of wreckage like so much rebar.
Baghdad's thirteen-century chronicle
shelled into the memory hole.

Heat radiating from burning books. Evidence of ago gone.

What has been unloosed cannot be leashed.

What has been stolen will be sold.

From their louvered window on the mezzanine, the stark,
darkened hill. From the roof, view over septic tank of the stark,
darkened hill; flounce of jacaranda in the zocalo.

Who has been torn from one son will be forlorned of another.

These are the sandals that bore the rubbings of
his skin. By this slough, they knew him.

Who has been silenced cannot be unsilenced.

The number of their dead to remain unknown.

Him with the scar Do not think him healed

¿Mande?

Nada.

¿Mande?

Nada.

to be cont.

One bright night: we will see through the oaths
of threat and protection
We will get out of our white cars in our white dresses
We will join the black dogs in a circle of the light
We will turn in the circle of the night

Memory murdered

Not so; instead

They are spared the television except in passing through the lobby. She struggles with the dailies in Spanish. *BÁRBARO ATAQUE, MÁS DE MIL BOMBAS CAYERON EN LA CAPITAL*. The headlines transparent. Except on the eternal bottom of the pyramid, expressions of outrage are everywhere, except on the bottom where hunger numbs even anger.

In Mexico's capital, which is teeming, which is sinking by inches, which is ringed by cardboard colonias, which are teeming, the day after the bombs have begun to drop on Baghdad, the florists are bringing their blooms to the heart, de costumbre, on Fridays, to the hotels and restaurants, the markets and sidewalk vendors.

And this Friday, no different, except the bombs are blooming in Baghdad, and in the heart of the capital of Old Mexico, which is sinking, the florists deliver to the zocalo, forming a quiet convoy, which stops traffic for miles, and the florists unload in early quiet, first light.

They empty their pungent cargo and begin to make a mosaic, which can be read by the guests in the Gran Hotel and the Majestic, which spells NO A LA GUERRA Y SI A LA PAZ. And the blooms left over which are given away to passersby.

And in Oaxaca City, on the roof of their hotel, looking over the zocalo: papier mâché effigies, calla lilies, vigil by candle, graffiti on the walls of the gringo watering hole, and a wasted apparition circling the center, panhandling for smokes.

And in the following days the taxi drivers head for the Alameda, in Mexico City, flying pennants of peace from their aerals, and traffic, which is teeming, is stopped for miles. All quiet in the capital of the old Aztec Empire. Silence in the heart, habitat of 22,000,000 souls, which is sinking by centimeters. Which in inches equals eight a year.

Calla lilies limp in their buckets
The obligatory pariah dog
Concentrates its starved mass on a step
Blowflies battling the head
The casket seller checks
For occupancy before locking up
Monastery deep in shadow
Worker urinating into a box
Under the Bridge of Martyrs
Disposition of small limbs
A face dark and deadish
The petal of one eye shutting
In Hidalgo's courtyard
The pomegranate tree spreads
Into its memory of a future
For the next ones to forget
Ink of the padre's letters
Gone to vinegar
For the next ones to drink
Desk clerk mesmerized
By the new media-borne war

In their absence the house did not burn
the pipes were unfrozen

The dog did not suffer a drop of neglect

The glorious photographs of their son were not stolen
from their second-hand frames

Not so; instead

She is in the doorway wearing black on black
she is facing the fate she has always faced

She is shedding the strength in her arms
as the bones soften and thin

A faint diminishing signals an adumbration
as a feather passes under a nostril

Her ears are led to the tree she trusts, the cedar
still sensitive to its phantom limb

Reading on a ladder, she begins to rip
the pages from the sewn spine

Nary a death arrested nor a hair of a harm averted
by any scrawny farrago of letters

The air in the kitchen too small
air that would fit in a matchbox

The sun lukewarm and then a cold spot
in a colder than cold bed

As of Friday 850 of our members
will be Forever Young

She burns bread and dislocates her TV

her all-American forgettery

Reading the obituaries, she counts
the ones older than her mother and father

Once in the alley avoids the fencing
between her and the albino dog

The true number of Iraqi dead to remain officially unknown
at the policy level no such estimates exist

The mind braying at the mind

A prescription for revulsion left in a taxi

A suffusion of color on a minimally disturbed surface
can calm the eye and the nerves

Our badly decomposed affairs are carted off
every other Wednesday

The writing in the trees remains illegible

Quietly, on Sunday,
in lieu of flowers
from poverty of divine direction
a crippling condition
watching a film a euphemism
for a bad movie watched before
a crippling condition
someone was coming to blow
away the fear
and names to be spoken
on her behalf
into a calabash
riding burro backwards
also cuts suffering

As if there were not other versions of the night
the pressure increases
As if the strong were not empty and exhaustible
the cavity inside her adjusts its light meter
As if the silence were not voluptuous in and of itself
the outer wall repels the cold
As if the string light under his door meant he were waiting up
how she had held her son her suddenly-grown-tall son
standing in the crosswalk in the drizzle
As if the scenery in her head had stopped revolving
if she dodged the picture it is obvious his sweater was wet
his watch cap sopping
as if the bone could not be pointed at the atrocious
As if they were ever going to quit catechizing everyone in sight
Her concerns fork out ahead of them but given their fast-forward track
and the national feelinglessness
As if all extravehicular activity were not now prohibited
What's going to become of us is the beauty used up then

The momentum of lives shifts into the absence of thought
The first task is to recover the true words for being

In the event of our death

you will have to roll your own poetry

Inside an hour the thoughts of one would not be
far from the thoughts of the other

As she searched for the origin of their bond
her left arm felt somewhat numb

A coincidence had been coordinated by a friend
of a friend at the Dark Dog

Or was it the fight over the negative balance

That fight was over in 126 seconds

Are we dying or did the power go out again

There passes my casket she says to no one

All of us are being conducted to a single point

One might say the same for plants

Do you have enough money for a taxi

Is my heavy hair still a comfort to you

I want you to burn every notebook, every disk,

Every ream, every scratch of my improvident pen

Until then,

In front of a doughnut shop someone's son is shot dead
A witness on condition of anonymity
The slow open vulgar mouth drawing on a cigarette
In a face once called Forever Young
Now to be known as Never-a-Man
Gone to the world of the working and the prevaricating
of the warring world of drywalling of lousy test scores
of fishing from a bridge on a brilliant afternoon
belt buckle blown undone

Recollect reading to her boy
reading to him in bed overcome herself
with sleep as if drugged or slugged then jabbed up again
Come on Keep reading Don't stop Don't ever stop
like she was saying Beauty cannot she cannot marry
the Beast and tonight as on all other rose-scented evens
He stumbles the Beast he stumbles from Beauty's empty chamber
In agony he goes in agony the fur of his fingers
smoking until it's her boy he is the one saying

exclaiming Yes Yes he will he will marry the Beast
until he is the one who conks out
as a light pole struck by a drunken car
And suddenly it's raining like plastic
When she stumbles at last from the room
he is the one who shakes himself awake
and yells Protect me and she is the one
who promises exclaiming Yes Yes she will I swear
if it kills me I will as once the mother
of Forever Young shot in front of the donut shop
must have sworn if it killed her she will a boy
So quiet the reporter heard from his kin
You wouldn't even notice him on your electric bill
Over there it's a different world
Desperate to be rejoined to this one
It is still raining like plastic
the brazen daytime rave of cicadae cut off

In a fast fade to black a low intensity shattering within

to dramatize the break

Her confidential informant is her imagination
Requests for him not to be photographed

in this position not the flash of flesh

the powder burns that pepper the chest

You won't believe what I was dreaming

to the flash of flesh, the scarred back

(Do not think him healed)

Go back to sleep

It never happened

There was a cenote

and steps dug out of the centuries

and dogs always dogs

The hot iron on her chest she feels it now

It is her familiar the fear the sear

She is driving or is she being driven

Trees and fences fall behind an oil truck

changes lanes (without warning)

The water on her right looks dead
bird sanctuary void of birdsong
She forgets where she is headed a meeting
No an errand an appointment is her life
comic or tragic that card stays
facedown she doesn't even know what hand
she's playing or whose house belongs
to the white rhododendron

Across the river is a whole other world:
hotel (once grand) with a ballroom called Starlight
A lobby that smells like assisted-living dinner
smoke-discolored chandelier
Aloe vera and bromeliad felted with dust
And toenails of the truly old painted
for twirling across polished floors
And one of the old ones in a camphoric gown
says she wore this when she was smaller
Spotlights on the fountain tinted for travelers
in the time of terror color of the koi
Wasted figure in a tall mirror

clad in ratty rags forewarns

These are the last hours of empire or some such

inauspicious whispering So? What? ;So can I have a cigarette?

(in the absence of any foreseeable remedy)

She ran off with a fallen aristocrat an adventurer
cut down on his burro by bandidos

Belt blown undone wrecked down there

When she came back to US
they sent her son to Baghdad

whom she vowed to protect if it kills her she will

There's not a troy ounce of compassion in this scenario

There is the inhuman dimension

The bridges breaking off in chunks
of grey libraries folding

School buildings indistinguishable from penitentiaries

Like I said to the doorman the other night

Some moon, huh

You should have seen it before the war Miss

We must not get used to this

to be cont.

The burros are not young the macho a balker

The trail frays every which way

Coffee comes from bark

Tortillas made at dawn with a base of dust

Niguas bore into the soles

The brindle dog deserts

Fleas

Cloth on the ceiling to catch scorpions

A mattress is unheard of

When there's no rawhide

A catre stretched with saplings

Flies

A hot wind beats us off course

Warm beer or warm soda for supper

Ascent without end

Rumor of tigras and leones

These maps are worthless

No supper

Fire moving this way

No corn for the burros

Cactus for privacy

Ticks

Pigs are another bother

No breakfast

The landmark mahogany struck down

The brindle returns

Snake

Running low on paregoric

Snake

Cactus for shade

Running low on water

Smoking husks

The macho with an ulcerated back

One of us with dysentery y yo embarazada

A woman con pistola y cuchillo

Wears his trousers for comfort

Riding low

A boy the señora says

Fifty pesos

Hands washed with mescal

He will pass out

In the corn crib

He will cut the cord he will

Cut it with his teeth

It devolved on her to speak through the shadows of events themselves:

Animals or men passing through the night
al otro lado

Without documents, blankets, contacts,
without water, without *with*

Freeze, dehydrate, burn

A knot of unmoving human forms
waiting for a bell to quicken them

from pueblo without medicine maize or milk

from colonia of cardboard without fuel or flour

Mira: you will never see faces like this again

These are the ones who loved you these the ones who hurt

Chihuahuan sun sizzles in its blackened trim

Now moving at the speed of laudanum

Treading sand and dust under the big dry socket of god

Discarding the shawl the straw hat that protected nada

Desert floor entering memory hole

Ants beginning their business from the inside

The drag road unavoidable

Every footfall a giveaway unless

I was just thinking

I hadn't worn a dress in so long the current between my legs
Witching when I walked the library shutting hours ahead
clock set to remember something cars abandoned on the off-ramp
plows forming a convoy on Wampanoag Trail in advance of the white-out
starlings blown through frantic branches snow disappearing the rhododen-
dron

Allied military reports

Deadliest day for the forces as of Wednesday 1418 of our members
Super Stallion crash not counting the number of their dead
no such estimates exist sandstorms on the accuweather map
near Ar Rutba in the western region town of 22,000

In his suddenly-grown-small room the boy freestyling to lifted beats
Telling him through the door The dog has to go out now
And turn down the freaking sound and No Fumar in the house
Snow blowing in every direction electricals on the blink

The handle turning clockwise the hood obscuring all
but the slow open mouth Who is writing something down
he does not care to share

to be cont.

NOTES

Our world the world of colors is *the* world. —Julian Beck

“Can you describe this. / I cannot.” References (in the negative) Anna Akhmatova’s “Instead of a Preface” from *Requiem*.

“the national feelinglessness” is an expression of Julian Beck’s. It appears in *daily light daily speech daily life* translated by Riccardo Duranti.

“That fight was over in 126 seconds” alludes to the famous fight between Sonny Liston and Floyd Patterson, September 25, 1962, Chicago.

“Alle glücklichen familien ähneln einander; jede unglückliche aber ist auf ihre eigene art unglücklich” is from a German translation of the first line of *Anna Karenina* jotted down when leafing through a bookshelf in the open-air lobby of a hotel in the Dominican Republic. I failed to record the translator’s name.

“Pigs are another bother” appears in *Where the Strange Roads Go Down* Mary Del Villar and Fred Del Villar’s account of their journey on foot through the Tierra Caliente of Mexico in 1951. “These maps are worthless” appears in the text in Spanish as “no servian para nada.”

Pages beginning 10 and 15 are re-workings of a text composed for a collaboration titled “Ligature” with poet Forrest Gander and sculptor Douglas Culhane.

The revered Zapotec President, Benito Juárez, from the Valley of Oaxaca, battled for justice his entire adult life. During the French invasion of Mexico he had to keep moving to avoid being assassinated; so the seat of his government was a black carriage.

“One could not in fact see to see” is adapted from the last line of Emily Dickinson’s “I heard a fly buzz when I died.”

Sopa de pollo, chicken soup, is used because one of the terms used for undocumented immigrants from Mexico is pollo and their smuggler, pollero. A gruesome description of the human body’s stage by stage collapse in failed crossings is found in *Devil’s Highway* by Luis Albedo Urrea.

Notes on the notes: I might have included other notes but I lost my notebook in the Barrington Public Library, February 19, 2005. And that was that time. While my preference is to include notes in a more interesting