

Learning to Sing (Excerpts)

Learning to Sing

You don't start with arias

You start with a sound like a frog

A guttural noise in the back of your throat

you let breath move there

Primal body - unknown thing

inner machinations

Won't the fist in the throat open?

Will that coil in the throat give way?

Home*

Draw from the tight spot – What does the body say?

<ouch>

What does the body say now?

<yawn>

<how is it, I'm in here?>

Maybe I'll run out my eyes
exhale myself out this shell
in octave glissandos

Pour yourself out with me
Shriek a high C

No need to stay stuck in the throbbing numb
no need to chant a litany of daily assignations

you can't always tell— but the body defaults to calm
your body has a book of psalms

while it punishes, it is still giving, still forgiving

*Esther Traugot's exhibition of sculpture at Chandra Cerrito Gallery in July 2012 is the inspiration of this work. The artist works with found object from nature like shells and branches and attempts to "put back what's been abandoned, broken."

After Traugot

shadow cast / cast a line
a reel
like shadows cast by a reel
film—which enlarged a line of text

dark inky thoughts explode light

annular shadow
a shadow thrown eclipse
around the shoulders: a throw

to warm in the cold
the shade you bring
the cool darrk to the sun bleached bones
blanched in the sand

gild and revere
manifest concept
repeat replicate the knot tie the loop
the process prime primp
wrap revere

put it to your ear
can you still hear the ocean?

we're landlocked below ground and rooted
even though we sleep in the trees with the peeling bark

The sea steepers inside me—
I crochet the calcium to shell

and I spill purple

I spill gold

After Ghidini*

A very old dictionary might tell you
what your ancestors thought

or how ideas were printed in ink instead of pixels
the mitochondrial state

(it's the fragments of indication: words: organized by the precise order of sound)
they march through the pages—an army

the spelling bee's hymnal will oxidize song

each word was exhaled then
each word bled from the quill

pressed printed and fingered curiously

oh precision oh meaning skewed and altered
thought sounds expelled - influence expressed

the spine holds the pages – like the ribs hold our heart

as a square on the table – staid potential.

* Sheila Ghidini is a visual artist. This poem was inspired by her work on paper, *A Very Old Dictionary*.

Do you remember that drowned town?

You could see the steeple's point
bore the quiet reservoir, but I can't tell
if the hymnals' refrains still pulse
magenta neon somewhere deep.

Instead, I study the tarmac's slow
procession: it flings its silver vessels
skyward, like how a bed sheet snaps
her wrinkles out. *I don't know*

is an anchor sometimes. Less like
a beacon, and more the shine of
knees behind knees and elbows too.
Friendship is a catch

below the trapeze. If death alone is
certain, but the time of death uncertain—

What shall we do?

Advice

The woman holds
an apple against her
stomach. The train frames
her figure, standing,
holding on. The morning
commute rattles, burrows her
through a suburb, a bay,
downtown

I felt an orb flashing
I think it was green and yellow
What now stars?
Rewind to early
mornings, a warm night
lazy— Drift in a boat
face up the sky, wait
for stars to fall
tears, slough off
fall asleep
What now stars?

At Night

Blooming (siren) jasmine star
candlelight and the red bulb
in your doorway open; soft stone stairs;
the nude model stands in your window.
The kind night reflects her back
her round face, her cropped hair. She holds
a cigarette into the dark outside
the window. We drink red wine at night.
There is a kindness to the lights
of the city below this hill;
a softness here in the night inside—
(outside a blurred limp, pale moan
of the covered with soiled quilts
boxed-in the doorways, sleeping.)
This kind of night—, slight respite
as the drunk headlight finds
the full palm. The night frames
the lit window, her bare back,
the perfumed guests all granted
pause from the day-mind's toil.
All released, for now, from bright—

Origins

While the cottage burns
I seek the love letters
Grandmother “never” wrote;
all the bows loosened
all the beaus lost.
She waved her hand and the crickets ceased.
She closed her eyes and night fell.

If I had a hatpin and a one-trick pony
I’d pack up the buggy and circle back
to the river. Mostly because,
it is still day there

In that light, he says he’d like to paint
my expressionist portrait but
I don’t know what he means—

“It’s where I look at your face and
list the missing in action,” he says,
“I’ll gaze at your breasts and pray.”

Meanwhile, the baby-sitting
and never once bored.
The curl of her ear, vanilla wafer
What will she hear?
The steadfast drone of a City?
No one can wave that away.

Please, kiss the strange bruise inside my thigh,
dissipate in the morning, whisper gone—.
I’ll contain myself like nesting dolls;
forego the sweat-drenched mask.

While you're up, please get me some water
open a window so kissed frogs can escape.
Butterflies will peel themselves
off my windshield, to flutter away—whole.

Not like the letters, now lit,
they rise like orange monarchs,
cool like white moth.

Habitat VI

After Lukas Felzmann

The water rises and the water recedes

The asphalt covered and the road drowned

The asphalt covered and the road baptized

Drops spot the grey expanse of the valley floor

Their ringlets sing and echo the water

She wades in this collection, kicks and splashes

Thanks heaven for the God-sized puddle

The still lake will be mirror for the king of kings

The mighty sky mourns for its reflection

The grey expanse of sky begs for reflection

She wades, she kicks, she splashes

She asks for the king and the fog answers, like steam.