

Mother Tongues

I heard their English well enough, but burbled
my tumbling lung song of fluid light,

then room light--pallid florescent, a blue
or bluish hue. I hummed blue for some

time until I met a plastic spoon that altered
the patterns of my vegetable speech, radish...

I spoke radish for weeks, then apple,
and much later, after seashells and fire,

after college, where I mastered a rare garble
of sandy argot, into my house flew a bird

and I picked up wind, chatted tall in tree,
whispered night, prattled bone, and bayed moon.

History of Dinosaurs

The chicken dreams of hot marsh and brackish
pools, how he came to be oppressed or granted
free range as if dominion wasn't his to begin with.

The chicken is full of self-loathing and grieves
at the cruel joy he takes witnessing his kind
mutually squandered and ceded to the will

of the farmer's twisted hands and careless axe.
When there is no work of heads upon the stump,
he imagines a time before man marketed bird meat;

when fowl ruled. Descendants of the great Tyrant
Lizard King, meat eaters! If he could just stomp
the earth, his claws might appear, gnaw the fence,

his teeth might grow into crushing jaws, his scaled
bombarding tail sweep this place into the Stone Age;
his pterodactyl tongue lashing the rubble oblivion.

Departure

It takes the whole weekend for you to leave;
I didn't grade papers, read manuscripts, didn't
even write; you made coffee, sat; we mulled over
bathroom designs; I showered and perhaps then
thought about where the line breaks would go, how
the poem would be a tender way of looking back,
something I would have folded and slipped into a shoe;
you wandered through each room, passing your bag
still not packed; the sex was good, sudden but not
rushed, maybe I would mean laconic, not brusque,
maybe I just meant we know how to reach the end
in a loving, necessary way; everything was slower,
but not like waiting room waiting, not like the tension
of pre-departure delays when the plane stops pushing
back and everyone is thinking at the same time maybe
we're not leaving; and everything we didn't do or say
just keeps spilling into the last thing said or not said,
everything we were sorry for or forgot or would have
again when you returned...as if we could do that.

Poetry Critic: a Found Pastoral

What a marvelous second gesture toward the beautiful
bucolic barns and revelations of wood and bugs in wood;
the poem like a deed to an old claim the critic is banking on;
pain in the bent rough iron of the place; a cobble stone path
teethed in weeds, that once lead to the aspiring gabled roofline
of a cathedral Saltbox, now crumbles off and somehow away
from counter-weighted chains, hay hooks, trochaic rusted / tin can
wind chimes that no longer adorn or sing / but blight and bump
back / a clunky operose apostrophe / to what passes on the road,
the pathos of superb lineation channeling the breath for reading
the line's crestfallen ironic resuscitation of loss and Lacanian foreclosure
presaging the real ruin: no banker / no mortgage / no mortgage
mercy / no souls—a lyrically chiasmic recapitulation of negation
and absence; "broken open gates," "splintered rails," "tilted tractor
carcasses," delicately hardened preservations of bankruptcy
Lorded over / by a token cross rooted in the field / and a conclave
of apostolic crows, who circle the air indifferently, remainders
celebrating nature's long division and decay, what is inevitable;
though there must have been moments, subversions of joy
when the poet's acute focus and measure found insatiable
prospects for "trudging" life: pedantic inchworm / scaling
the spiny rib of a leaf, / has no idea of our century, / nor how
slow is his progress and refrains; for here no one shoots the coyotes
who parse these vestiges of what was always theirs before it was ours;
the house is a bird house, mouse hole, spider web, raccoon rafter,
a cat's cradle the county has long since scheduled for reclamation.

Shanghai Pygs: an Adynaton¹

The number of dead pigs retrieved from waters in and near China's financial hub of Shanghai has reached 12,566. – Associated Press

Finally, we can know their legendary knuckled heads,
glistening black-pearled eyes, ripe peach-fuzzed ears,

scribbled lipstick smiles cascading on the slathered banks.
Otherwise we might have gone on suffused by their mythic

élan and panache, flying chorus lines of winking hips, placid
thighs, and glistening rinds. Otherwise we might have lived

shanghaied like Rilke by Louvre light and believed anything else
just as wildly. Like thousands of river-bloated pigs tossed

and turning in a blanket of truffled dreams: free-ranging cool hills,
tickling pillowed bellies with their adorable step-stool hooves,

cloven for scoring chubby, sometimes broken hearts, wounded
by mercurial love, or on drunk nights just ruminating on the stars.

You will see the boatmen one morning embarking on the Huangpu
river, paddling pigs aside and bellyaching how this used to be easier.

¹ Adynaton: a-dyn'-a-ton; that which is impossible: "when pigs fly."