

Excerpts From

The Beast

After Paul Tran

“I wanted to see myself / Both as I was and as I wasn’t. Good survivor. Bad survivor. Since I
couldn’t be / Free, I chose ambivalence.”

-Paul Tran, *I See Not Stars But Their Light Reaching Across The Distance Between Us*

A hydra is a nonce, or invented form, coined and written by poet Paul Tran. The form combines the tricks and nuances of many pre-existing forms, primarily the sonnet, sestina, and a crown of sonnets.

There are thirteen sections in a standard hydra, each one based on a sonnet but with the final line taken away. The final line (ie. the thirteenth line) of each section contains thirteen words. Each word in a section's final line becomes the first words of the next section's thirteen lines. This loops back around, as the final line of the thirteenth section contains the words which start the thirteen lines of the first section. To demonstrate this, I've chosen five sequential sections (IX-XIII) from a hydra of my own entitled *The Beast*.

IX. Failure of a Followed Form

Off. On. Somewhere in the middle. The purgatory of power, electricity notwithstanding.

The field I'm in is surrounded by a fence and my eyes look up to a spire. This is the third instance in which something has been tall enough for empathetic vertigo— time and time again— to kick in and smack me to the ground. I fall what feels like one hundred feet, the reality being one-twentieth of that, the force vacuuming air from my lungs. I fall without charm, graceless and ugly. Once before, in middle school, I slipped on the stairs of the bus and only after seeing if I was okay did they carry me inside. What would they have done if I didn't start breathing again? What if the last sight my eyes would see was the flagpole, vertigo number one, and I died dizzy and breathless?

Chance had more obvious plans for me that day, thankfully.

Hasn't the boy suffered enough? Clearly not, because since that day I've been left with heartbreak and cold beds, a missing figure next to me. I don't fit its outline, Yet I am a failure of a followed form, lines broken into pieces.

X. Their Last Breath

Yet I know how it feels to forget how to breathe, for someone to take the action away. Even now I couldn't dare try to forget the lightness, as if I could float even though airlessness would mean I

am sinking. It's a sentence that rambles on, like the last train of thought of someone dying, a long epilogue no one can read though it could give answers to questions no one asked, not

failure per se but sure as hell not success. Dissatisfaction exists as a border between the release of death and the claws of life, and I know this border well. Two of my friends have fallen,

a misfortune of time separated by four years. Both died in the springtime. April as followed by May are equally cruel and any sway in one direction is sorely misguided. No

form can describe it, no documentable written word can capture the shock of grief, the lines that form on faces where frowns settle into their tectonic movement. Not quite a

broken heart, not quite a broken psyche; perhaps they felt the same before they fell into the reality of their actions. I only know how the second one died.

Pieces of prescriptions accompanied their last breath. One week left until they're cold.

XI. Ice Body

Pieces of purgatory, composed by crumbling hobbies and clothes strewn-about: my last memory of you is soiled by abandonment and a legacy corrupted by people who knew better.

Prescriptions from the scripture, surrounded by your holy word of irony accompanied by vile satire: that was your defense for it. Now I understand.

Their music saved you from the hell of home, nevermind the inevitable allegations and your last major purchase (\$500 on a limited edition CD). I think, too, of people I know whose breath was close to ceasing. My first and former partner, a namesake he did not reach. One classmate standing behind me in an 8th grade ice-breaker.

Week by week I seem to forget these truths: living memory superseding a dour reality, a left turn into the abyss. Some of us are ghosts from birth, meant to hover alone until the moment someone notices us. Such was my partner to whom I gave the light of day.

They're memories I leave behind, or at least I try to. His touch was not warm, Cold as sex. *You press me against your ice body. I say no.*

XII. Cannot Climb

Cold air even in a heated home. There's nothing you can tell me I haven't already known.
As I sat on the bus, realizing that this was the resolution without music to distract me from your

sex (or rather the impact it had), I cried. I apologized to no one (or rather to
you but you were not there). I had no number to dial, no words to send, no buttons to
press to hear you one last time. *And how funny is it that after the world gave
me death and destruction, you didn't have the mind to ask how my mind was.* I pressed my head
against the window hoping that I would see something to distract me from

your absence. Maybe in Syracuse I could relive Carousel Mall, visit my grandparents between
ice cold gusts of wind, and whatever else to pretend that I didn't want my
body against yours anymore. I'll visit their neighbor Mary, who knew about my boyfriend before
I never told my grandparents. Maybe some amateur rock climbing in the place my cousin would
say was her favorite. I'll go there alone and start up the plastic cliff, fake rocks now crumbling—
No footholds snapped rope worn-out harness deadly-red cannot climb I cannot climb I

XIII. The Beast

No more room for the words I've yet to say like too-small
 footholds in an old park. With a click of time, something
 snapped inside of me. *I'm allowed to fall.* To hell with the flagpole's

 rope double-bound around a pulley hoisting
 worn-out banners into the air. I don't need your
 harness anymore, *I'm allowed to fall.* Skin and mind alike are

 deadly-red, burning up like a wood stove that
 cannot be shut off, an influx of kindling in a cold season. You
 climb up, hoping to catch me in the middle. *I'm allowed to fall.*

 I lose you in the dead of day, meeting you halfway and you
 cannot catch me. You look down to me plummeting before your
climb and you look betrayed. I never knew what I meant to you, but the pit calls me further.

I found myself within the beast; now I know the beast is me.