

She-Bear Sleep Walking: *A Fable*

You see her half  
slumbering— she's bundled in  
heavy folds of night,  
quilt heavy bulk of darkness—  
stars sewn close to the landscape.

The night sky reveals  
no dreamscapes any longer—  
prophecies are stilled,  
unstitched from the horizon  
oracle scrolls are silent.

Stumbling-drunk shaman—  
she's wrapped in a quilt of guilt.

Intricate threading  
of past lives as a heavy  
winter coat surrounding close.

*a murmur of crows  
crazy eights  
tilted rose*

You see her, unaware,  
sleepwalking in the waking  
world through cypress trees,  
hesitating while mid-stream  
under cover of darkness,  
or as a slipping  
into green waters of night,  
the salt caked on your  
lips, thick brine across your hands,  
as the incoming tide shifts—  
its presence numbing  
the senses. Swimming at night  
darkness approaches  
as a she-bear sleep walking,  
the unknown future clings close.

*missing silver  
cord of wood  
cobblestone heart*

Swatches of colors  
shift across hand-dyed cotton,  
rows of old beadwork,  
the strung stones of memories,  
rosaries of discomfort—  
She fumbles with frayed hems,

stained edges left thread bare.

She stands hesitant,  
blue-black pelt sleek with motion—  
a solitary figure.

Tipsy from fasting  
and lost prayers, her keening song  
bites the air, reflects  
the forgotten childhood hymns—  
mumbling fragments which remain.

*fallen snake fence  
open barn door  
cup and saucer*

Under cypress trees,  
a figure telling her beads.

She will pause, tarot  
deck scattered, autumnal hymnals  
unbound, torched leaves ungathered.

By mid-dawn, awake,  
she'll pause. Slough off her jacket,  
a second skin discarded.

Her constellation lingers  
on the horizon's blurred edge.

*A quilter's story is never revealed— only slowly acknowledged.*

## Innumerable Crows

every so often, in the middle of the night, my body startles awake—as an explosion of crows, shuddering from trees

February first, and already a dead crow appears in the road, his dark wings animated with wind from passing autos

with calloused fingers the spring full moon pulls open stalks of black iris, their heavy mouths bruised with the violent purple of ravens

from the front doorway we watch the lunar eclipse creeping slow, a drunk old man in a crow-dark coat holding the whole of the moon

with vague intentions we drive to other cities, pass dark-lit satellites perched on the thin border of the star-deep horizon— unexpectedly, a slight rain starts, the same way your haunting descends on me, without warning— sudden mist on this old crow

another moment: three feathers tumble across the back porch — crimes of neighbor's cat— but now, he sleeps as Buddha, in the sun's lap

give me the fury of fallen angels, that force within Elijah struggling within the wastelands waiting for the Word of God to descend as crows over his sleeping body, an acknowledgement of his cause, the internal nightly wrestling with angels

at night your eyes change, darkening deep as wild flights of ravens, moving in furious close circles, covens waiting for the moon

—what is left to say? A list perhaps: rain lingers on the evening's hour— the cat curls within himself— I will dream of crows tonight

on the porch again we trim my hair to the skull; I am surrounded by flocks of these last few days— small reminders of the past

these three images remain constant elements: a crescent moon, thin-lipped on the night's horizon, crows winging through a still life, and maples burning their dark illuminations through the silent neighborhood — the pen pulling out each icon with new purpose

a divorced couple: you can hear their argument swinging back and forth with accusations in public— barbed words litter the cold air

even in this rain, developers level out the landscape, leaving a solitary maple, and one darkly vagrant bird

seabirds or ravens— two nurses, distanced, translate me to object: blood, urine, body fat—it all shifts to ink across paper

after a short walk we turn back, take a different path home— from the fields a spiraling  
storm transforms to innumerable crows

driving through downtown, windows fogged over, the world drowns, full white on  
white— until the moment a crow appears, laughing in mid-air

for now, close the book, shift the pages together as a roosting crow— turn off the lights,  
room by room— let the night settle within

## The Krewe of Pan Enters the City

1

When you stand without me in the cross streets of  
*Rue Soleil* and *Rue Lune* during the height of carnival—  
hold a sprig of a Louisiana live-oak  
    in your left hand,  
a muslin wrapped bundle of raw salt  
    in your right hand.

A new scene will unfold around you  
peeling back past histories of parades,  
as you stand among motley jugglers,  
clustered musicians, bewildered tourists,  
and the drunk teenagers retching out their lives  
onto the damp brick side streets of the French Quarter.

Allow the scene to surge over with a sudden rush  
of understanding, with unexpected clarity,  
as it draws you in with ripples of music  
off the streets, the controlled chaos  
surrounding, numbing all sensation,  
drowning deep your present tense—

2

Even now, with myself a thousand miles north  
of the Mississippi Deltas,  
memory walks in unannounced.  
Unexpected. A prodigal  
lover repentant, remorseful,  
wearing the same clothes from last night.

Smelling of stale beer, cigarettes,  
flashing a sheepish grin, then—  
swallows me whole.

    And so, even here,  
on stage, I can feel the soft pulse  
of Gulf tides lapping against

my ankles, then my knees and waist,  
rising above me in a salty ascent  
of water, the heft and swell of the past,  
all coming forward from one chain  
of notes, one brief measure of music,  
as when the first krewe of Pan entered the city—

3

the crowd in papier-mâché masks,  
angels and demons exchanging crepe paper roses,  
the series of cardboard floats strung together  
aimlessly, as a half forgotten memory,  
a poem loosely bound by instinct or mere phonetics,  
as when memory becomes a phone call

in the middle of the night, the phone vibrating  
as a cicada on its back, buzzing, stumbling forward,  
having a violent seizure of wings, until  
a drunken voice pulls out, wanting reconciliation,  
the voice recalling an ebb and flow of feelings,  
melody released in the distance,

a series of notes strung out beside the corner pubs,  
where locals linger and ghosts wander, looking  
as fresh runaways, barely legal, not even trying to cover  
up the constellation of pockmarks on their arms,  
as they panhandle, wander between hostels,  
gaunt expressions peering up at passersby—

4

I once stood here, years ago, pulling out notes  
for spare change, random associations from memory, replaying  
broken phrases, repeating the various assemblage of notes  
which nightly I sort through, even now,  
as a collective memory of the city,  
the overly painted faces of revelers flashing,

flickering in their ecstasies, as the phalanx of brass  
and drum corps motion, pull towards the river,  
and myself shifting between various fragments  
of songs and pebbles and white shells left behind  
in the tributaries near the coast, my sax waiting  
for the momentary pause between intake

and release, as the various floats motion towards the river,  
lumbering with their cacophony down beat, with myself  
nowhere near the city — yet knowing that the spirits  
from long ago are released, surging in the wind;  
they rise by as you stand submerged in your own memory,  
in your own stumbling moment of sudden clarity.