

A Short History of the Inner Ear:

3 Poems

Weight

It's leaned into me like this for ten years,
always wants to be the one on top.
Every day, I sit with good posture, practice
pressure, throw my mass on lineless pieces
of paper. If I just try a little, waiting collected,
patient, is a poem with its hair combed, rearranging
itself in its clothes, trying to be agreeable,
apologizing for the fuss.

When your equilibrium goes off again,
when you can't walk a straight line,
struggle to focus your eyes on me,
ask that I speak into only your left ear,
let me lay its weight on you.

Sure, it's going to hurt.
But you'll be good in your body,
and I'll say the dark little things I say
to both your left and right ears.

Vertigo

It's really nothing.
It's just a thing that happens to the body,
even bodies with largely plant-based diets
full of thermodynamic energy, healthy
bodies of athletic American
men in their prime.

So it happens to your body.
You are bedridden, crash
your bike, can't gauge your
volume, start reading lips,
say it's like having the spins
and never sobering up.

Because you so rely, primitive,
on the sun, it gets worse at night.
But you continue, insisting
on walks at twilight through Hyde Park,
curious about what lives in its dark.

We say prayers at our alter,
light candles so both the gods
of reason and magic will bless us.
To learn something new—
a type of holy work—
we listen to the sound scientists have
identified as the big bang's residual echo,
a giant *whoosing* sound, a deep hum
throughout space, a kind of churning,
like a washing machine.

Quick to buy what these scientists are selling,
I clasp my heart, bring my eyebrows nearer
my hairline, my mouth gapes. All the sudden
I recall being shot into being,
the cacophony that pervaded.

But you need more proof.

How can you be convinced
what you're hearing is actually
what you're hearing? Especially not
now when only your left ear
is worth a damn, when you're having
to rely so heavily on your other senses.

The Body Letter

To Whom It May Concern,

You might think that should be a colon,
that I should use the more formal punctuation
instead, that addressing you requires it,
but I have so little space to get your
attention, I went straight for the comma,
its suggestive dip to the left.

I don't know what variety of woman
you entertain, your standards for honoring
requests. Surely, you must know I'm ridden
with mistakes of my youth, bad credit,
and an old desire to self-destruct that flares
up sometimes like a bad case of gout.
But I know how to work hard the way people
use to work hard, not the diluted
version of work hard the kids do today.

I write for the body of a man—
to beg its pardon, pay some fee, bargain.
Shake the sound back into his temporal
bone, forfeit all the secrets murmured
into the bald space they fall—
a black clearing, a noiseless nothing between
crowded minds— and the singular relief of a world
where I won't be heard. Set the old gears
grinding in time, in pressure, precise,
save the many ways the body can betray.

He doesn't show his face when it's this
distorted by grief, so it's never a memory,
so no one's there to witness him hemorrhage
all that ancient joy, lucid and pure, the lightness
of his body. So one day he can shrug, casually say
Oh, sure, I was sick once, but not anymore,
take off for a running start,

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throw all his many limbs up and over, turn
circles in the air until trust in his body
to do as it's told returns.

What's the going rate for a man
like that? You've never seen a thing more
in love with the design of the body,
his body, more excited to rub form up
against function and make himself go.

I keep thinking,
What's holier than a shaman, a priest, a poet?
but can only hear him say Swiss cheese.

What's the going rate for a man like that?

Yours,
A.