

with a twist of lemon: six senryu

if your pen
and my paper met!—
such poetry.

you laugh:
my hummingbird throat
beats against its cage.

dark eyes and darker lashes;
nothing is sweeter
than brevity.

Sunday morning—
the paper mumbles, meaningless.
I read your coffee rings

down the street,
not across the road:
I don't skip a single block.

I carve your name
on each of my branches but
it is the world that bleeds.

Celestial Bodies

Dark, bright eyes: ebony chestnut and marble, blue, you;
gold hair, sunshine gold and amber—a bit blue, too.

We antithesize, paradox, parallel—
I scream tangentially past you
shooting star sprinkling dust
a thousand asterisks
for you to shovel off the stoop.

(I always knock the footnotes off my shoes
before I enter your apartment.)

What do I have to show
for all that hammers in my heart?

A cloud of shining words in orbit,
burning away in the upper reaches of your atmosphere.

My love it is a quiet thing

My love it is a quiet thing,
A patient hand on wheel;
And steady as a silent spring
It keeps an even keel.

My form no timber, no birch-bark
No needle pine consumed;
I warble like no meadowlark
No kestrel crying doomed.

Yet as a sailor to his port
And falcon to his perch,
The lee-wind tears my sail apart
So heart and tongue do lurch.

A life in several paragraphs,
And death's parentheses—
My heart's too hot for metaphor,
My fire doomed to freeze.

“Aztec sculpture of the god Quetzacoatl”
two thoughts on Meso-America

I

Quetzacoatl
Radiant divinity
Feathered serpent now still stele
Stony in silence
Sedimentary scales flecked with the dust of age
Layered around his holiness in concentric sprays of deific plumage
Pinions pinned in the moment’s beating wings
Hummingbird rapid—but
Condor quick, and soft, silent, unheard
The all seeing serpent himself hides
In rows and ridges
Time has taken its toll on this carved creature
Rock-locked and lost to flight’s timeless mortality
The instant now an age
Bejeweled, bedecked with charms and honors
The coup counted around his neck hangs heavy, like himself,
Stone, like himself;
Like his stone, like
The day, cloudy, vague, ill-defined:
Felt more than seen.

Oh guardian of the sky temple
Oh lightning illuminator
Bring me rain
Without rainbows

II

From afar,
the accumulation of cumulus masks the rainy basin
below the tall tree’s tops
where denizens of that airy realm
titter and play and feed on one another.
Sky, earth, water—
all mingle as one.
Memory stirs here, too;
fog-like, mist-like, river like, mirror-like:
a dew-drop glass suspended from a leaf tip
reflects the world and, in so doing,
encapsulates and contains it—
a perfect pearl of remembrance, exquisite

in every upside-down detail.

A new world of monkeys, sage-faced, lithe-limbed
prowl: ebony, ivory, russet, cacao and terra cotta,
emerald and jade ribbons peel from branches
lidless eyes open from the inside to see more deeply.
Tongues taste aromas and threads rising from below
and fall delicately from above.

Were we to creep closer, we too would see life in myriad shapes:
the piercing eyes and keening cry of the harpy eagle
the welcome threat of uninhibited mortality:

golden gaze
tar-black talon
plumage fresh-plucked from Andes peaks.

We scuttle but cannot escape his grasp;
the snow-white reaper culls the strong
to make himself stronger still.
His beating, bloody throat,
eyes bright—

the barrel of the gun
the diving altimeter
the gleaming airlock
the edge of the guillotine
the pearlescent sclera of the judge

—we gorge ourselves
and are in turn gorged upon.

Sky-god
do not weep for us
when it is we
who should weep for you.

the tyrannous stars

- 7 I pick out stars for our constellation, but it's so hard to choose:
So much darkness between us, but *so much* light.
In the distance, already fading *going going gone* we lose
sight of each other, wrap ourselves in strangers and sounds, neglect the paths we might
use to find out way back again. But I refuse
the trail signs, street signs along the way. I *will* fight—
- 6 but not for us. I've made my choice
(or had it made for me like so many times before). You've already refused
my paltry attempts at peace. Light—the only bit that's left, weak and light
indeed—freckles your face amber clad in halogen and cold and even though we might
never meet again, I can't bring myself to touch you, trembling. I can't lose
- 5 control—and maybe *that was the problem in the first place*. To lose
you seems such a large thing *now*, a fight
that should have been louder, larger, more—all my might
against your silence. But back then, the choice
was obscured, blurred by the brightness around me. My ego weighed me down, not light
enough to lift above petty pride. You almost refused
- 4 to meet for the last time—just like back in the beginning. You
refused to even consider me. Life was full of people we could lose
ourselves in. Maybe that's why the crowd, the public place. We even lost ourselves in the light
of each other. Now, evening rain slicks cobbles—bloody from the coming fight (*our* fight)
and the sinking sun spilling his guts on the street. A good choice,
then, to end like beginnings. To start again at the ending. You might
- 3 even change your mind (or so I thought). I might
even apologize (or so I hoped—oh god I hoped, refused
to think about how *bitter* I was, how much I *hated* you, how I *chose*
to hate you). The sun gets in my eyes, blinds me like I blinded myself. So I lied—said we'd lost
each other, that I'd lost you—like some kind of fight
I couldn't hope to win. Truth: *I threw you away*. Street lights
- 2 brighten the pavement (or the gloom deepens, I never could tell which) and now house lights
are lamp yellow eyes sweeping the sidewalks. Try as I might,
I cannot slow my steps to the square where our fight—
for love? understanding? each other? to win?—will end. The sun refuses
to go down, will *not* set, and what a terrible fucking metaphor—trailed by twilight I can't lose.
Now it is too late to wind back the clock: we will meet and speak and break and why did I choose
- 1 to come *here*? Morning light filled me with optimism, a desire to refuse
fate an easy win. Starlight, star bright, might I skip this chance tonight? I always seem to lose.
Ask me again: in a fight between a world without me or without you, which should I choose?