

At Cave Hill Cemetery

Some say a beginning, others a conclusion—either way
it's a window into our earth, the starched slate quiet monuments,
or the eroded wool posture of each etched angel's worn face.

It's soul & silence; it's sun & silt—the gospel
of the body spread in the hope of how it ends—that it ends—
in each step we take forward in our bustled jars:

our bodies taking shape from earth; earth shaped from taking
our bodies. We walk the brink so well that we forget.
But here, each branch lends itself another arrow through.

& all the cages the body tries to dodge relax into groves,
coal pressed crystal beneath the lake, cloud caravan across
the blank, gray & white winnowed lips to daggered blue.

All these leaves waxed out, shelling seeds incarnadine—
this twisting blonde exit of summer & lost
or buried clarities—I think, right now—I can't help but become.

Limbo

In the end—if there is an end that is—we might not remember
this exchange. It may be simply washed away.

The words breathed between us evaporate
to particle & become—to swill, to sweep, to storm.

We go—once more, from the chest—into prayer
as we would a door, not really knowing if its entrance or exit,
departure or arrival.

How we might be the sentence God is breathless saying,
bodies balanced from divine tongue-tip,
a dancing king marionettes through his own forgiveness.

Or that God might be diving from the rim of our lips
into a manger or a cross or dribbled wine & wiped away.

& so it's outside in & inside out—a broke vocabulary puzzled
back to whole in portable shrine, in patterned pulse.

That name a marble in the mouth, swaddled in the air
as it begins to exit—bright bolt coughing in the vault,
an alphabet of rain, the bowls our fingers weave
to drink the water.

& this is you: standing at the door,
a curtain torn & soaking at your feet.

Our tangled roots, our messages,
our sapped and sinewed particles.

These invitations to which we've all said yes
before the envelope is opened.

51. Heppner, "The Literary Imagination and the Doing of Theology," 218.
52. *Ibid.*, 218.
53. *Ibid.*, 220.

Every Prayer a Blasphemy at Last

So easy to mistake the sky for heaven
& the ground for all we've got. But gravity does
her thankless job & we forget what keeps us pinned to earth.

We shuffle through days, forget small graces found
in a peeled orange, a nearly finished book, an audible hum.
We go right to the knees & call it communion—rehearsed
reverberation,
reunions & address—as the way we think God wants it heard.

The heart a little atlas with many islands to explore;
the mind an anthology of losses shriveled in the arid evening air.
& both may bring us closer to the vapor in the hull.

In each of us, words cloud to vision: cirrus, stratus, cumulus—
wish to capture every shifting sweep to recollect the story.
Hands white-knuckled to the unknown like it's a parachute.

But we're braided constellations roaming out the earth, we're wound
about God's finger so we might not be forgotten,
& we're kissing gravity on her contented mouth, lucky
to survive the fall from such a height.

Amen Amen Amen we shrink and crumble to a dream,
& thankful for the distance plummeted between the scapes,
that words can only fly so far & are bound up in our lungs.

Bone Cartography

No. It cannot be a named reliance—the map
has its own folds and tatters—a silence
which we must respect, but not always reach.

The way an infant ladders the ribs searching the terrain
of a breast, hunger blinking in her breath or the blade-scratch
down the hill of cheeks & hair washed through the drain.

Always what we give away brings us back together.
This compass, this magnetic abandon to the grace
of weathered pattern: pantapon hues, moon-rise,

dusk-matter, snow. What matter trembles in the sky
is just as inexact. & we—yes, we—annunciate the angles
of our prayers by moving just enough to bump into our walls.

We keep naming the body by what it isn't or what
it was or what it can't become. The turning in
& turning toward eastward slow stab, tendoned topograph.

O, to get it right just once would be so nice—this asphalt,
this fission, this jupiter light tangled in the stars & it's our better
angel sketching out a way to remember close to what we are.

Loving Thy Neighbor

Baking bread, I've run out of flour. So now I must go door-to-door
& ask for what I need. I've bled up my gall to stand on your little stoop.
Funny, there was no door on which to knock, & worst of all
I couldn't even make a fist—forgotten how—& I couldn't find a way
into your house. All this audacity I have made moot by the things
I couldn't see, the stuff in me that leavens then recedes: courage,

cowardice,
craving, or clarity. That when I ask, I rarely want to know the answer.
So, are you comforted by such a creatured thing? Asking, that is.
Are you happy with the little mind I have?—whipping up metaphors
to symbol out a truth, to circumstance & qualify the process or the
means?

Sure, I've heard the rumors—people saying that you're dead—
but that seems harder to believe than some other things I've heard.
& if it's true it isn't news—we killed you long before
& now we've just begun to see you're gone.
Perhaps you're simply smaller than you were before—age I'd guess.
Emaciate from growing old, slighter each day with the calendar page
you tear back from the year. Once so monolithic
but now just some grouch retiree

My god, please come to the door.
My god, my god—do you need a drink? Do you need a thing to eat?
Forget the ingredients I'm asking for—are you okay in there?

. . . You're the tchotchke
we've corralled into a hutch, curio to possibility. What you were
is what's harder to imagine: wings & robes turned pillboxed medicines
& an empty cup of orange juice; clouds & tongues of fire turned tepid
water

ringed grimy in a tub. I've been around the block enough to know
the tragedy of lonely widows, pregnant teens. I've seen the evidence
we've leveled & it's not too pretty. Hell, I'm part of it myself.
But friend, can you get up one more time & let me know
you're there? I'll bake you bread if it means I'll see your face.
Your body traded for my offering—to a neighbor who has moved
or is asleep, or fallen down & needs help getting up, or isn't inhaling.
Or maybe you're just rising & waiting for a visitor, maybe you're
breathing

deeper than you ever were before. & I'm here now
to catch your breath, & brush your teeth, & sit & hold your hand.

Hallelujah I'm A Bum

I was told the way to water: go down to the river to pray.
& so it's what I did—followed the highway till a bridge emerged.
It wasn't easy, but I took the hill careful & stumbled. I took the hill
not knowing what to look for—not knowing if our paths would cross.

I should have seen it coming: graffiti, dilapidated couches, cans
of beer & metal scrap. Not so much surprised as let down—
a stop for mendicants or rebel teens: nothing really mystical,
no elegance or majesty—just a silent mucked-on river moving slow.

So I started counting out the junk—the litter & the rocks—
thinking salvation might arrive. But goddamn—it took so long
I grew a beard & had an itch to wander. But you already know that
don't you, friend? Already know the time

we waste seduced by possibility of change—wishing for a vision
instead of simply taking in the scene. Yes, I got tired. Yes, I sat down
in the ashes & dust of the given day with no one around
to see me cry. Human, I know, but so is counting I suppose.

& I wondered what it must be like when snow settles
on the river here, the canopy of bare trees there—I imagined
all the seasons that I'd missed before I came, the little ways
we measure out the life: skimmed waterbugs, cattail cloak,

leaves blundering their color to recede—anything, really,
to semaphore an evidence that things stay as they're made.
There's joy in knowing everything evolves—that even you
must sing a different song to each stone buried under sand,

to every animal teeming in the water. & the garbage
that we make even has its place upon the shore—
orange filters crunched against the curb, bottle caps,
& broken glass: every little thing accounted for & placed.

I was so relieved with revelation I reclined the sooty couch
& picked my fingernails, & read the writing on the wall. Above me
droned the intermittent cars, rolling their engagements to the future,
cargo hurried over bridge & bath, taxied to an unnamed destination.

& I wondered who might let me hitch & where I might be going next.