2003

**Caller ID**

Plamen Ivanov Arnaudov

*Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses)

Part of the Creative Writing Commons

**Recommended Citation**


[https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2374](https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_theses/2374)

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at LSU Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in LSU Master's Theses by an authorized graduate school editor of LSU Digital Commons. For more information, please contact gradetd@lsu.edu.
CALLER ID

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts

in

The Department of English

by
Plamen Arnaudov
B.A., American University in Bulgaria, 2000
May 2003
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karmacoma</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milk &amp; Mackerel</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laptop Commuter</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mazurka for My Lovely</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postcard from Home</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If It's a Crime Why Do the Dogs Do It?</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surviving Well</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side B</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Made in Heaven</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Cyclops&quot;: A Sculpture by Ivan Popov</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ozzy</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On the Hanging Bench</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Must Move</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mind-to-Eye Coordination</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Celluloid Puberty</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bookcase to the Heavens</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shadow Boxing</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pyrrhus Triumphant</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atlantic Explorers</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspire</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coming of Age Again.................................................................38
Return of the Living Body...........................................................41
Thing.......................................................................................43
Another Poem About the Exact Opposite of Life............................44
Serial Brainkiller........................................................................46
Ulu Dag Setting.........................................................................48
Gluttonous Dog Goes Solo..........................................................50
Caller ID....................................................................................52
Party Leftovers...........................................................................54
Midnight Madness.......................................................................56
Solomon Stays Home.................................................................58
All About Me.............................................................................60
False Spring...............................................................................62
Fusion Cuisine...........................................................................63
On the Mutability of Music............................................................64
The Ordinary Business of Life......................................................67
Party Plans..................................................................................69
Premature Halloween of the Mind................................................71
Born and Risen..........................................................................73
Fall Where There's May...............................................................75
Look Out, It's Wednesday!............................................................77
Wicked Memoir..........................................................................79
Damsel on a Camel...........................................................................................................82
A Milligram of Silver........................................................................................................83
Poetry 2002....................................................................................................................84
The Sun King...................................................................................................................86
Jedi Viagra......................................................................................................................87
Angst Reloaded...............................................................................................................89
Dust in a Tall Glass..........................................................................................................91
Frankenstein on the Banjo...............................................................................................93
Aphrodite Instead...........................................................................................................95
I Won't Be Everything..................................................................................................97
Blood Lettering...............................................................................................................99
Android Milk................................................................................................................101
Call the Locksmith.........................................................................................................103
Reverse Gardening........................................................................................................105
The Fullness of Things: A History................................................................................106
Clockworm.....................................................................................................................109
Ugly Love.......................................................................................................................111
Hello Homeowner.........................................................................................................113
Dress Rehearsal in the Pyrenees...................................................................................115
Moving Pictures.............................................................................................................116
First One's Free.............................................................................................................118
Vita.................................................................................................................................120
ABSTRACT

As one might expect from a young poet writing at the turn of a millennium, recurrent in "Caller ID" is the theme of struggle with literary tradition and of seeing it as both necessary and constricting to the project of forging one's own creative identity. The collision between history and the self is visible in the often conflicted references to great philosophers and poets of the past as well as in the call for renewal of the body poetic after an envisioned 'end of history' marked by creative sterility and exhaustion. The proposed renewal does not entail destruction of tradition but rather a replenishment of poetic curiosity, a newfound thirst for restructuring and linguistic play with and within the tropes distilled through the ages.

Among the super-objectives of "Caller ID" is the desire to marry the unbridled vigor of post-modernism with the higher stakes of Stevensian poetic inquiry. In attempting this uneasy fusion, the voice slips on a series of masks in order to take on subjects ranging from the mundane to the sublime. What remains consistent throughout this collection of poetry, however, is the voice's unrelenting interest in observing and commenting upon its own creative proceedings.
as for the hand of god I’ve seen it
many times when I was a child my
father had it he usually kept it
out of sight swaying just beyond
the terminator of his planetary bulk
he conserved it so that its power
to dispense fate would not wane but
in time it did as my teacher took
the hand from him and rested it
on a book I should read and only
understand a decade later what she
really did to me, yes, the hand
was a woman’s then and it scared me
that I couldn’t read its motions
any more I ended up a totally different
person from what it had planned it
isn’t magical it’s embarrassing
knowing that I’ve hardly ever
counted all the hands in wait
MILK & MACKEREL

Fishermen go where the fish is –
past the sprawling slaughterhouse

over the sandy railroad tracks
between two giant concrete mixers

at the mouth of a secretive pipe
where the milk spewed by the dairy plant

casts its slow elongated sea shadow
stretching from here to the slanted pier

where two ships are not being unloaded
by the ogreish strong-arms of rusted cranes

and before this industrial altar
the privy fishermen arrive in ones

and twos to gape at the sparkling backs
of mackerel mullet and scad packed
into the bottleneck of this minuscule milky
gway gulping like a flock of pilgrims

trapped inside the horn of plenty
being fattened by their ravenous gods.

But this fish is not good to eat.
The fishermen just like to watch

smoking silently on the oval rocks.
Only now and then a wanting hand will

sink indiscreetly into the melee
and fondle its curvaceous chaoses.
I’m walking home after seeing a movie at a friends’ place, two beer bottles clanking softly in the plastic bag, what I got to take home with me. That and the moral that some names age just as badly as people do. Johnny is still alright, but Frankie is def. passé. I must remember this; if I ever have a kid the least I can do is give her an eternal name. Like, let me think, Helen, I suppose. But only because of the poem. I guess the other way to go about it is call her anything and then parachute her name on top of mount Parnassus but I don’t know if I have the back for it. Must be because I was around younger folks that I get these mature thoughts steeped in post-traumatic resolve. It was painful for all of us to sit there and try to watch the movie while the would-be couple was busy courting in the couch corner. Even Pacino couldn’t steal that show. Finally, they took it to
the bedroom and normal circulation was
restored at least until I felt too bloated
to take it any more and they came outside to
see me off and we were all surprised by fog.
It was solid, yet shifty, a low-flying cloud.
And so “I’m off, muchas gracias and I’ll see ya
(next time when there’s no real need for a
medic.)” Once afoot into the fog it’s not so bad,
it even works if you’re into magical realism.
A murky van passes slowly and I know it’s
the kind that the serial killer in *Silence of the Lambs* used but I stopped being paranoid
in the third grade when I got my first harmonica.
Instead, I busy myself watching lamplight
pierce through tree coronas and dissipate
quite effectively because of the mist particles
and I realize that this is the answer my friend
who is into 3D animation was looking for
this summer when he asked me how the fuck
does one make light dissipate effectively.
So obvious I feel like I’ve forgotten it
many times already. Nature is a great teacher,
although its timing can be greatly improved.
Like, what’s the use of knowing what I know about her now that she’s pissed and wouldn’t even let me brush the outskirts of her aura?
MAZURKA FOR MY LOVELY

The sun is early again stealing over the poplars
with crimson cheek a full hour ahead of schedule
and the postal workers adjust their gait in midstride.
It curves its furtive eyeball across
the nacreous dance-floor, a coquette,
a match to every fox-trotting charmer.
Whatever game is brought to it, it pins on its lapel,
a dancing card blanche fringed with tsunami protuberances
as seen on television, curlicued inward
like floral patterns impressed on the hilt
by the green thumbs of cumbersome murderers.

Yes, the sun’s up and running now
and hammering my sap to a slow sugary syrup
so why not prune my weeds a little?
It’s enough that I kill, I know nothing of being killed
It’s the same with love, the same with eating a fresh pear
downwind from the sea garden.
I came, I ate, etc. No apologies. I have consumed
all in my path, I am its worm and maker.
I lined up my guilts on a fig-leaf trireme and bid them row.

They did that for me. The wind helped, I was lucky.

But that was years ago in a broader mountain

with ridges crowded like rippling muscles

in the tight t-shirt of a black-eyed sky

and the memory of it brings no particular odor

to this, today’s, sun so crude and flirtatious in its seeming,
so full of itself, of light, and everything.
POSTCARD FROM HOME
after Marques

this is us posing for a picture
in front of our new house which
corresponds to all we ever asked
for we are looking forward to its
soothing curves settling inside
our memories like armor soiled
by our own bodies first and then
by the little army born in
the fun-fairs of our solitude

and as we each travel at the tip
of our lives we are the vine stems
that wind and rub themselves against
the walls and become a film, a living
plaster, the house's muscle tissue,
and one day years from now
when our tendrils devour every
particle of brick & mortar
we will become one imperishable beast
and it's this – death – that makes us smile
IF IT’S A CRIME WHY DO THE DOGS DO IT?

Although I’ve made my fortune on tricycles
I’ve never ridden one myself. It seemed
my clientele was mostly hopeless romantics
who had set out to change the world in the 70’s
but ended up just as unshaved and terrified
as any convict on death row with the calendar
staring back at him through the sultry eyes of a stripper.

Sonny & Cher had each other. All I ever
had was too many drinks on a collapsible sofa
while the world whored after crew-cut politicians
and let itself be dug into a rabbit hole,
a fitting end to this galaxy’s most unlikely planet.

I was impressed at first by the sheer size of it,
stretching from conundrum to conundrum.
My short-skirted astronomy teacher said
it was parallax that made all the difference.
Funny, for me it was always vodka that did it.
Not like Superman changing in the phone booth
but not unlike him, either. I had little interest
in flying against the clock. No lost loves there,
no uncashed winnings. The kind spirit
in the see-through bottle only empowered me
to become a different actor new to this part
with each word burning foreign on my tongue
and dropping weightlessly as if from a clear sky
unthought and unthinking as the tinkling sound
water makes when it changes vessels.

Tonight the air is pleasant to the skin
yet nothing like the touch of a gipsy woman.
Dangers and temptations lurk with equal ease
behind the corner, past the blinking street light.
I’m waiting for the gun-toting burglar who
will threaten to change my life forever.
This love for the crying game, well, it’s mutual.
We are bound to want to tell and end up entertaining.

This time the chorus chanting on the front lawn
stands for ‘renewal.’ There is only enough light
to evince that a couple of decades ago births
were successful in perpetuating the circle
of mouths around the broken cup from which flows
nothing but fluidity, suave conversation &
wit on tap, the kind that promises fireworks
and delivers such a comic little fizzle that we are
moved to forgive ourselves for hoping. After all,
it’s only Friday and nothing has died just yet.
SURVIVING WELL

The night my roommate returned
from his first strip club
and said he had tried to pay them all
equal attention was when
I got my common cold,
the beach I had to storm
armed with only a skyline
of smelly pillboxes
5 dollars worth of lemons
and of course the kindness
of a blue-eyed compatriot
who was filling in for
both mother and lover.

Alas, that these days should only be lived once,
the white haze and the sharp haze were both lovely –
riding a high fever in the back of a car,
pinballed from mall to mall like some sordid fleur
water-skiing up and down crowded isles
with my eyes hooked onto her jean pockets,
many sneaky kisses folded into one sneaky kiss,
and always the possibility of fainting
victoriously, like Aretha on a broken Victrola,
what more is there to be had?
Knowing it was the vessel that caved in
and not the cave, I begin to look forward
to scratching this year’s gilded trophies
and wrapping around her heels at the Ides of Xmas.
in New Zealand where people walk
on their heads a woman won
custody over her lastborn son
precisely because she was a hooker
and the magistrate who knew
better trusted her experience
in navigating between boos
and taboos you see he wanted
the boy to grow strong
like an actor with the right part
who takes things to a next
level which is even more remote
than reality and what if that
cherub face so guiltless and calm
witnesses our bedtime comings
in such a way that makes us all
content then even God might stay
his hand and rest it on the breast
of the virgin mother
MADE IN HEAVEN

a woman lost her poodle in
the topography of chaos
in vain she would call it by name
but as soon as it got dark
the poodle came back as a burly man
who rumbled mirthfully about
the shape of skies and women’s
feet and she gave him hers
to rub and to hold
because he had the air
of a vet who had just returned
home from the latest war
and they lived happily for half
a century except for the times when
it poured steel butterflies and
the heavens were too much to bear
“CYCLOPS”: A SCULPTURE BY IVAN POPOV

Out of the raw rock – nature’s demonic marvel
maimed in a billion mindless crunch times –
a crafted monolith emerges
chequered into a 3D chessboard
with a single black square. The odds
are stacked against the black eye
which alone sees all and has to sing
it to the blind body
with lament or praise – doing all the work
right there – upon seeing a dust cloud
briefly hurricaned by the feeble breeze
behind the scenes
behind a pair of eyes
he sits on a cushion
in a hotel room
unwrapping presents
with such ennui
that each breath
clings to his teeth
and circles them
wondering which way
from here within
or without

I’ve never
seen a tower so
thin at the base
so abandoned by
its builders.
It’s not because of
age that inertia
is his last muse.

It is the dream

infecting each cell

with its glamour

They say “Guru is a mirror.”

and “Ozzy does it.”

He needs only to keep
calm and babble his
comforting curses
standing tall and dim-witted
for all the underdressed
ON THE HANGING BENCH

night peppered with mosquito spray
and illuminated by swirling octane figures

conversations in the paper-thin air about
fresh paintings of things that resemble things

and three people who swung on a hanging bench
letting it all catch fire and burn out

before it even happened – we were that heavy then
the three of us swollen like bees returning
to the sunken river and the white house standing
on its last rotten legs, our eyes flaring in near-darkness

like ferries waiting to take us beyond
familiar geographies and into each other
deriever upriver than even Charon would dare
to an island with a watchless moon
and magical vending machines where we could
retire from our search for the famous source

and dip toes in the muddy running waters
until we were made clearer to ourselves

at least clear enough to split apart
MUST MOVE

talking to Dali’s *The Divine Comedy Inferno Canto #1*

My friend the painter knows my illness
without knowing me. It’s there in the books
like a bubonic rat squatting on a reef
waiting to infect shipless hypochondriacs.

“You can have two furies but not two fates.
The map of things has been set in stone
and a glass of quicksilver poured over it
will momentarily know every shape.”

What does he know about it that I don’t?
What about the woman with the bleeding
smile, pregnant yet casting such a pencil-thin
fracture across my line of reasoning?

She steals away from the scepter’s aim
into a flowery foothill. She will make it!
Nature becomes her. Those flowers are hers
but they are no company, no father to any child.
And the trees lined up like captured bishops
leaping out of the canvas, who are they?
I pity them, trading their little hilltop
for a ticket to absolute spectatorship.

Meanwhile the horseman gallops between
two suns until his bulging forehead is pressed
against the ice mountain just as all movement
is directed to the point at which it ceases

and thought becomes a picaresque fossil.
MIND-TO-EYE COORDINATION

“Here. Take this to your master.

Not this. This.”

The boy bends in confusion.

Under the shifty light
of a thousand candles
the scrolls all look the same.

He strains to read the signs
but his eye is too slow
and the inkworms wriggle away.

The boy is disheartened.

He has entered like the dragon
who expects a room of mirrors
furnished with his own beauty
and plagued by the lurking
deformities of a doomed enemy
but the script has thrown him
into a library instead.

His fists able to draw
milk from stone, his feet
able to out-dance a spider, his
gleaming torso that slides
through bed sheets with
the ease of wind –
these swords are dull
and useless now.

“Not these. These,”
the enemy taunts
far from doomed
mastering him.
CELLULOID PUBERTY

a hundred years
into a dream
the cake-faced moon
plops into a lake
of faded rose petals
and I suddenly remember
my body and how to
walk out in the middle of
this torn crescendo eden
before the final credits
administer names
to all the stars
BOOKCASE TO THE HEAVENS

This is the age after all foregoing ages.

It’s now cheaper to recycle.

Revolution torched the libraries
but I have my Keats backed up on digital.

There are 365 bones in the human body.
So far we know the names of only seven.

The new Buddha is meditative inside a pagoda
and oblivious inside a skyscraper.

A student of history savors his Vogue.
It’s ready to wear and sexy at last.

“Of course you’ll take another drink!
The night is young and has your name on it.

– I am a photographer. I paint what I see.
Occasionally I get paid just to look...”
“Welcome, but you can’t come in.
(No more vacancies in the aquarium.)”

Another genius sweeps the bookstores.
She discovered a new way to talk about it.

“What we need now is a good long war.
I got laid a whole lot during the last one.”

The planets make us what we are:
He is sandy like Mars. She is noxious like Venus.

Up the stairs and into our first attic.
At this juncture, it is paramount that we weep.

Everything has been said, very little heard.
The tin-hearted crowd marches in its footsteps.
SHADOW BOXING

Today was spent like any other,
small sleep and the Internet
coughing wet dreams from porn sites
and satellite photos of the tropical
she-storm I’ve been waiting for ever
since I heard it killed a bunch of people down in Cuba.
Her rapid curves can do that, she’s a wound-dresser
without the sympathy, a foghorn-tooting bitch.

I’m sorry. I know I shouldn’t “take it personally”
because “that’s just the way it is”
and besides “there’s really nothing I can do”
but what if “I can’t help it”
because “I’m in love”?

I keep missing her. I’m beginning to think
I’m too tiny for my age. Or maybe it’s the haircut
that does nothing to set me apart
from other green-eyed giants with haircuts.
Maybe I should shave it all,

expose the bumps for her reading pleasure.

Maybe she’s a phrenologist and her eye

will be irresistibly drawn to the text

scrawled on my cranium by God and DNA

and Significant Accident with a Razor.

Maybe she’ll be so startled

by what they have all co-written there

that she will read it out loud for me to hear.

It will be just like Abraham

eavesdropping on a subconscious

run so much amuck that it got

a holy book rolling.

I am the religious bureaucrat –

I always put my prayers in writing,

in duplicate and triplicate,

stamped all over with disclaimers

like “I was drunk then”

or “I was too sober,” or

“It was pouring too much shit.”
Sometimes just the date is enough.

For me at least. October 3rd, 2002.

What little faith I’ve saved

I wish to squander it all now

on a phone-call that will answer it.

But the rest of what I am –

these cumbersome arms and legs –

all they do is rub themselves

and leer at the soul-stripping

peep show until my skeptical loins

catch fire from the crash site

and plunge into a pair of

eyes like petroleum lakes.

No dice today and no raging storm.

The bedroom is indestructible and empty.

I lie face-down on the green felt

and fall asleep by trying not to think.
PYRRHUS TRIUMPHANT

What perversion rules that a bloody axe
can sink deeper than a judge’s gavel
and cut the Gordian guts of the living?
Does it originate with men or beasts
this diaphanous aphorism of war as answer?

I never counted the bodies on either side
and I never built any monument for them.
Those I knew and those I imagine all
of them different even where names overlap,
fast asleep in the same long olive grove.
As for the next ones, I’d rather they’d be born
to a clean slate and light beginnings.

If anything, my monument is a story
which I tell to my sons while the hawks
are out hunting and I let them scour
the shady fissures in my mind for
small game that will grow in their talons.
ATLANTIC EXPLORERS

I.

The woman in the red wineglass wants to have it now
but ‘now’ is another concoction I have yet to experience.
I pour myself another and instead end up talking
about it – this moment – bulging out of
the frame like an elephant stampeding towards the camera.
Again I am introduced to my own madness
and little wonder that I cannot recall her name already.
What I do remember is the lisp and her bandaged index finger
pointing at make-believe now’s and zen’s, filling in the betweens
with a fugue of expirational vowels.
Were I a glider I would catch that draft.
But I’m a talker and this is the only ground I fly on
in a borrowed black suit with a coffee sheen.
I need to be poked with a more brutal stick
for my strap-on head to come off. I am round
and reserved for her yet she can’t take me home.
Not for the world as down-payment. Not even for the word.
Not now. It’s never now with me in it.
II.

I’ve been to civilization briefly once in the late 1940’s.
Not its proudest moment. They said, “Come back some other time.
We are closed for repairs.” They shut me out but I managed
to glimpse books dismantled like clocks on long oaken tables
and timid men with magnified eyes zipping up body-bags
full of the Last Magician’s orphaned rabbits. It was
unqualified labor but making up for it in quantity.
I backed off into a crowd, was washed out in a brothel
where the men went to let their Zeitgeists loose. I guess
you can call it a corrida except no one dodged the incoming.
Except me. It’s not agility that saved me then, that saves me now.
It’s not a gift, it’s a given. I was never there to begin with.

III.

“My next goal is the pole. Either one will do.” The extreme man
spiels right into the hands of his teenage female fans.
The letters start pouring in because his semen was tempered in every frigid wasteland from here to Backthere.

When asked about it he denies, thus adding ten centimeters to his fabled modesty.

Such stellar growth can surpass even Christ’s but only insofar as there are more women now than ever before.

Again, the object of this exercise is to look at each thing with each eye and to not confuse a simile for divine indigo.

I know I do, every time I’m reminded, of home, of the taste of a petroleum sea, I am tempted to say it tasted precisely like the small of her back in the shower, but that’s pushing it.

While she’s out I tune into a cartoon lion planted by TV Network Intelligence to assist in the hopeful birth of heroes.

Wait a minute. This is my heart we are talking about.

How can I follow it? That’s absurd. If anything at all, it’s a sponge for my brain sweat.

But I agree in principle. We need heroes these days. Doughnut-dunking heroes, heroes at the workplace.

We need every single hero we can get.
Ah, but not so fast, you poet!

Even a gentle wind blows harder than your stormy verse;
it’s real enough to stir a girl’s sailing hair and slip
a breath under the light fabric of her dress.

Compare your dark lady with the sizzling geishas
on Hallmark Television, all dressed up in SGI
and Dolby-Digital. I rest my case.

Then I act upon it.

I am now stripped of all life that is text.

I pack only weapons of the lethal kind.

This is great and it works
because you always know when you’ve been killed
unlike when you’ve just been enlightened
by a quick read on a safari somewhere in Kenya
en route to see all the elephants Hemingway
was survived by. Not many left now. Soon no one will
remember this war. Just a dent in the tidal wave.
a girl reaches
the lower parts
of the emerald tower
she’s been over
the rainbow and
now she wants
back under the
bed sheets
of the farm-boy
where magic sparks
unbidden and real
each time when it’s
almost dark enough
not to see
COMING OF AGE AGAIN

I’m crossing the Rubicon now for the last time, the time
to pick sides and stake a chunk of land to call my own
before the continents split so far apart that it becomes
impossible to visit all of one’s blood spread too thick
over too many graveyards, sperm banks, and boardinghouses.

I’ve exhausted seventy horses and still arrive last
but it’s not a true race if it lacks a glossy finish –
this globe has traded in its old-fashioned rim for slippery
new horizons. (I have felt
at odd times like spilling out into the cosmos
just for the sake of taking this protoplasm to another star
but my lover, Newton’s big-boned apple-picker,
wouldn’t let me. I’m grateful to the bearded Cerberi
for guarding the doors I’m not ready to open.
I know I can’t handle the truth
about people’s hearts and the big bad Universe.
But every time I enter the map room in the alpine
house of all nations I wince, it numbs me.
All those color patches aligned so perfectly. No room
to squeeze in a country. Even the islands, ah, the roundest
ones taken up first and already dented by nuclear craters.

* * *

We are hostages at the public
library watching the terrorist flip
his magical pencil and erase our grandmothers
from the pages of history. Our cries grow fainter and
the cowardly pronouns desert me.

I’m alone in this goddamn’ Siphon City
where every word is copyrighted by someone long dead
and inherited by his great-great-grand-carrion eaters.
I love the economy but we don’t talk anymore. She’s a slut
and I am an earthworm with a purity complex,
rolling over in the puddles
until I’m drowned enough to fall asleep.

The heat is always on but I’ve never met the Irresistible Cat
and although I am open to suggestions, this one thing
remains firm through thick and thin, this no-satisfaction thing
which has so many names but the funniest by far is ‘malady.’
As if the dead could return any minute now
with a vaccine for it. As if performing some voodoo surgery
and successfully amputating it would make a good musical
ending on a high note with petticoats flying and couples
and triples kissing absently through smeared makeup.

* * *

Such travesty this time around, such ill-disguised beauty
beneath every definite article of clothing.
She was not a leaf, much sturdier when
she shifted her weight away from my touch.
I was almost run over by her stuttering elegance.
I think ahead and extrapolate myself waking up into love –
the right side of the bed – the free ride –
the intelligent morning.
RETURN OF THE LIVING BODY

“What rhetorical teeth grappling unto the notion of food?!”

The wolf rolled his whites, bloody and fat with derision.

Here’s that meaty Mediterranean slap again, sling-shot from below
with simian prowess. One can never outgrow her own mother.

To put it edgewise, off and on, and out of the blue, this brain
needs to x-ray itself with something sharper than language.

Think of it as the avatar, the bull-headed bully you’d rather
not think about, deftly swinging his uninterpretable love bat.

I was stargazing that day until I almost thought I saw
the eyes of a wench on a bicycle run over my face.

Oh, excruciating anchor dropped onto the marble bottom of my back-
yard pool, crushing the tiles I’ve spent so many breaths arranging!

I, Mr. Cerebral Cortex, the renowned architect. What book is so great
that it cannot be whisked away by the mere promise of sex?
Cavafy, I suspect, beat it off in the library. He was truly great for knowing how to make love to the classics. I only managed a few bruises today flying home on the shot wings of a poem. The sudden slope and the thistles were not there to be sung.
THING

An ancient thing caught in the minutes
of our conversation like a giant squid,
now elongated, now vulval and withdrawn.
Not time, time’s just its cellophane,
the placenta that separates us from each
other even when we are twins, sometimes.

But then, so much instantly lost in translation
from water to hot air that the thing shrinks
in its shell until it’s not enough to feed us.

The shell is hollow now and ribbed where
the tender meat used to be. It likes living here
scattered among these lovely echoes.
Another Poem about the Exact Opposite of Life

When the second gunshot was fired

I was still remembering my first

fourteen years ago, under a red crescent

when I knew the word for each kind of cloud

and believed in the gay science of signs.

I have crossed many looks since then

but very few paths, never caught by no catcher,

freefalling into the abominable abyss

each night when I forgot my parents’ faces

and my palms were too sweaty to hold on to myself.

On the table there are three objects

that have been injected with significance,

a knife, a rose, and a shiny copper coin.

The man-child wraps his puffy hand around the knife

and wields it against a heedless world.

It has little to do with gift or courage

and something to do with tiny sub-atomic
particles called muons that bombard us
until it becomes impossible to discern
the smile on your face from the painting itself.

It doesn’t matter now, past the mirror
there are no more enemies to fight,
just a room without a view
furnished with one of each:
one bed, one chair, one lover
and finally time
to make up my mind about everything
but one time only.
SERIAL BRAINKILLER

Today’s fix of Nietzsche was particularly nasty.
I tripped all the way to the playground

and beyond, where he said I would find him
I met only Confucius with two bamboo sticks

for arms, weeping for a hug, what fame got him.
Why this compulsion in the great dead to vivisect

every instance of a limb in the living mind?
Such cruel entomology befits only children.

Yet, if you brush childishness aside
then there is no play, no little engine.

According to Buddha’s tape for winding down
there’s Pure Being (P.B.) lodged between the frames

like a steel splinter or the eternal silence
before the body crushes against sharp rocks.
I doubt it. I have a mind as sick as God’s
and I will pedal it until I get there.

I am possessed by English.
It’s a mall-rat, shopping obsessively.

Nothing is too real or too fake.
All I want is a watch that tells the time.

Plato’s pitch circles like a boomerang.
The Germans fall from their capital letters.

Fuck fair play. It’s a war out there –
each word a stuttering Gilgamesh.

I slam the print. Freud doesn’t love me.
But I want more than love. To be seen.
ULU DAG SETTING

They say it’s a short reprieve but I beg to differ.
I mean this beaten sun crawling through the muck
bleeding light from every pore; I keep hoping
that the record would skip straight to the part
where the big bad wolf gets to consummate.

I’m tired of waiting for the next best war
in which everyone will fight on the right side
and no-one will be left to blame, tired of waiting
for the moral embryo to chew its way
through the heart of the mammoth
with its toothless grin, tired of time and the weather.

Dawn on the day of reckoning floods the horizon
with nuanced static, ghost trails where radio channels
used to sprinkle their generous droplets of data
into outer space like urine marking human territory.
Now the scent clears and it’s all up for grabs again.

Left to the poets and philosophers, the city
dreads its metal bones crushed under so many memory dumps
and chants like a wounded bat, its ribcage at once
torn and supported by the vibes of its self-devoured song.

“What, are we done here, then?” The mastermind injects
his last hormone booster into a vanishing bloodstream
and it conjures up images of tribeswomen and men
with animal bodies dancing around the bonfire
on which the millennium turtle roasts in its shell.
GLUTTONOUS DOG GOES SOLO

for Semiramis

This week’s love interest picks up my sentence
from where I left it in a suggestive tremolo
and drives it unceremoniously under my nails
“with such a punishment, that if any other is greater
none is so displeasing.”

Let’s pretend it was the nightingale singing
of necessary voodoo and the pillow book.
After all, how many times in history
have two bodies thwarted disaster?
Zero, to be sure – a domesticated python
stoned by additives insidiously slipped
in its chicken coup of coagulated estrogen
and mock adrenalin. We all need a clue sometimes,
a prescription as to how to behave.
I found mine in the dictionary, it’s ‘palimpsest.’
She thinks it’s unsanitary and she isn’t sure
if ideas are such a good idea, after all.
As if small talk were ever good clean fun.
I mean, come on, not even in the empyreal days!
Fortunately there is music there
to absolve me of my criminal acidity –
the other hydra’s head slipping
out of the tenebrous classroom
begging to be followed outdoors
and enjoyed as a shrewd playmate
into the tall grasses of the abandoned soccer field.
Borne in her ancient tone without intonation
I begin to strangle her in my saxophone grip.
CALLER ID

for Smi, who is pure

On a good day, I believe in beer and the movies
and the mock concern of waitresses
when I tell them I’m (only) doing fine.
Truth is, I’m down to one phone number now
but this could be it; she might even pick up
and invite me over for that dress rehearsal
we talked about in the library foyer, the one
that was supposed to prepare us for heaven.
I could be anyone from Leonidas to Jet Li
as long as she gets to be Ophelia. It’s tough,
I know. Such hot demand for good female parts.
I can’t agree more without losing my head;
flattery and flowers can’t be questioned
and I’m all out of flowers, they cost money.
What I’m asking for is fairly cheap.
We like to watch, this pervert and I.
No, he likes it. He, the morbid Ventriloquist.
I’m just his talking dummy, although maybe
not dumb enough. I mean, on the whole,
I know about things especially when it comes to
simple logistics like how to fit seven girls
in a sports car without any conflicts of interest.
I get ideas then. So far none has gotten off the ground
or written a blank check but that’s not the point.
The point is I like it. It’s a poor man’s point, I know
but I’ll press it until I get a better contract.
In the meantime, my other brain taps the dial.
I love all mind-crafted objects but above all
the blowjob. Although it’s certainly great
when it just happens, it’s even better
if you have to work for it like a Richelieu.
I should have majored in graphic design,
I do so much of it for free. But I’m in
the wrong medium now – the phone.
I’m ringing. Pick up. Pick up, my dear
and let’s ram each other’s scripts.
PARTY LEFTOVERS

What fire? What emotional garbage?

If Conrad had to write those books
could I do any less, or more? I’m not

a circus animal yet I do aim to please

and the audience is always there;

it applauds the obvious but is never too

sure about ‘art,’ the winged buzzword

which helps the concupiscent sell photos

of themselves necking on lagoon beaches

with ants crawling out of their palms

(or any other palms so long as it sells).

Tonight’s surf was flat but there were

undertones that splashed huge orange

protuberances on my orgasmonitor.

Fie! Fie! Fluttering around the tip of a conservative pen

were things blasphemous and colibri-like,

itching to unfold like a thousand

paper cranes made of crumpled newspaper,

as if yesterday’s death of a million people
is commensurate to today’s life of Ms. Femme Banal.

But this is not a poem about periodical tragedy.
Rather, it’s about vodka with a slice of bliss.
I have no idea whether any of them will call me
when Pan taps his crosier for his satyrs
and dryads to return to the foliage terrified
by the voluptuous body of working hours
but it doesn’t matter because I’m filled
with that musky old sap again.
MIDNIGHT MADNESS

Everything turns to language when fatigue
and the small hours nibble on the day’s crumbs
colored like bonbons in the latest post-electric fad
and the claw-shaped devices of the mind begin
to measure their progress by dents and scratches
on the insurmountable wall of a lake.
I’m reminded of that P.O.W. who wrote a book
on a single grain of rice. It was a list of all
the insects he’d been collecting while surviving.
It’s never enough to just live without
compass and calendar. I shut my eyes
but the room and the slow light linger.
Little trumpet stabs echo in the stalls
and the horses begin to prance. Their muscles
misinterpret the sound of outdoors. What it is
is just bruised vinyl spun in the background
of a phone conversation with Lolita
and the slutty velvetness of her literary porn.
Now all is made sense of. The strings
running loosely up into the hovering dark
get tangled and the puppet dangles free.

Muffled drums beat the coming of age

of the backward eye.
that morning I woke
with a sore throat
and a waking fever
so I called in sick
took a steam bath
with the wives
they talked about
dyes and textiles
and I watched them
dress in the vapors
woven and painted
by their chatter
swift silken shrouds
with golden lining
brushed against
my wetted skin
as I lay terrified
on the icy marble
among titans who
gave each other birth
and the only sentence
I passed that day
I passed on myself
ALL ABOUT ME

Looking at the little hole I’ve dug for myself
I recall today’s words of advice from a sitcom,
“Don’t make your world too small.” I wonder how
I’m supposed to measure it when it is never
all it can be all at once. I mean, it’s like
Batman’s mansion/cave, (only he’s a much
flatter character than I) or that novella by Poe
about the spooky double who was hiding
in a nook in the guy’s cranny and so
one couldn’t tell his exact size, if any.
But I must try and measure it nonetheless
because it’s a milestone in my identity quest
and because I have nothing better to do
now that all my friends are alive and abroad
and the bars are already closed.
Just this once, I wish to talk about myself
and what I mean by being here and owning
the things I own. It amuses me to play the part
of that subtle FBI profiler who would have
lit candles for Freud if he wasn’t afraid
of being misinterpreted. He observes
my synthesizer with its high octave smashed
and deduces a violent personality, perhaps
a woman-hater, or at least someone who
dislikes high-pitched voices, surely not
a family man, way too messy for it.
The only thing that’s clean is his computer,
a substitute for love, says Madonna.
Maybe it was the Internet that warped
his social organ or maybe the fact of
deformity made him turn to the Internet
as the only canister for demented genies –
causality is such a tricky little river.
He may not even think he is capable
of murder but if pressed by someone
like a cock-teaser or the Third Reich
he can turn into a veritable killing machine
for the thing he hates most is pressure
applied to any of his sensitive areas –
it upsets his rituals, the day-to-day
flashing of laser beams at the opposite wall
and sleeping through the ages
they take to return.
FALSE SPRING

pollen ejects into the morning air and panics
when the icy tongues of a serpentine wind
lick it wet and heavy with wintry doom
but as it plummets toward the barren pavement
of a lively campus it’s caught in the quick
feet of eager college girls and swirls back up
up and around their goose-bumped tendons
like a cloud of moons trapped in a tornado
it rises above knee-level and further up
around the dancing steeples of their thighs
then the wind finally sees through to the ruse
and howls like a great white father slams
the pollen against flesh where instantly
it blooms into a field of frost-bitten roses
FUSION CUISINE

between now and then
the limbs of the living scatter
across untold distances
and sink like the vengeful
cartilage of a sturgeon
into the galaxy’s ravenous cheek

death-driven they draw
blood from stone, fire from
wood and language
from the rhythms of drawing

the bones triumph
and peep behind the canvas
where stark Galaxy
roars on to another meal
ON THE MUTABILITY OF MUSIC

What if I have said ‘yes’ to life,
as I think I did that night at the hilltop motel
when we got drunk and lay in the dark
each in his own exaggerated little coffin
bellowing pop songs at the bare ceiling until
the girls shut us up and we fainted to sleep.
We did that and I was there. Yet, today at 11:46
the eggshell cracked and I was again in shambles.
You may call it the razor of a demon’s wing
or anomie or caustic depression, a diagnose
by any name is just as bitter. It means
I have to start, from now till necessary,
turning about the stones of this lopsided tower
until I’m once more content with its edges. But
it’s bound to happen again, you know.
Unlike a kaleidoscope’s, this beauty is not merely
color and symmetry, it’s anything but that.
It’s a glass ball of twine, so disheveled and fragile
that a sharper gaze will crush it into jittery quarks
that’ll scurry away into the dark corners
and sulk at the stern parent for spoiling their orgy.

The Saturnalia will end as inevitably as Monday
and there’ll be quiet cleaners in blue uniforms
sweeping the shards of *amphoras and euphorias*
into their calloused palms and absently grinding them
back to stardust. I can see you groan and roll your eyes.

That’s not the ending you have in mind, I know,
but let’s be realistic about the humanity of it.

In elementary school they taught us one’s arm span
corresponded almost exactly to one’s height.

It’s a useful way of learning the limits of one’s body.

As for the mind, although it oscillates wildly
I’ve never seen one implode under its own quivering mass
so I’m tempted to say it’s going nowhere but here,
in this belfry, subservient to this urethral schedule.

Don’t give me that look of scorn. You would have agreed
if you could speak without moving your pen.

If it were really you and not that flagrant persona
appropriately and obscenely called ‘philosopher,’
you would have nodded now and asked for a beer.

And perhaps we would have ended up wailing
our complaints to another heedless ceiling
from the shallows of our understated coffins.

This is the Slavic way to fight –

my battle song and the echoes of yours.
THE ORDINARY BUSINESS OF LIFE

I.

“I see more interest in long-range planning
instead of love and ‘will I live happily ever after?’“

II.

“Honey, we’re living on borrowed time but don’t worry,
the Wizard will consolidate our loans.”

IV.

People die for specific reasons. Like starvation,
napalm, lung cancer, etc. To each discrete death
there’s a florid story waiting to be attached
which explains why it just had to happen.
And if a sci-fi writer with a deep enough vision
takes it to his head, it can all be traced back
to this one genocidal butterfly in the Pleistocene
that went for the jonquil instead of the daffodil.
Stupid bird, now look what you dun did!

V.

“I am thinking of the perfect prom dress.
It’s fancy and bold and has very little
to do with the rest of my life.”

XIX.

IIIIIV.

We are forced to stare
as the old couple in the
mirror undresses.
PARTY PLANS

I’m thinking plush and marble.
I’m thinking atomic submarines
bumping noses against the glass.
I’m thinking casual conversation
with a curly brunette who can
diss Shakespeare while appearing
totally drunk and naked to the eye.
I’m thinking low red dresses
and hopping Adam’s apples,
tall spies with *noms de guerre*
and relatives with empty scabbards.
I’m thinking beware of the six
senses, they are too readily pleased.
I’m thinking hippie like a CEO –
my world collapsed into a condo,
with strips of data for wallpaper
and shady replicas of horned gods.
I’m thinking a lithe blue robot
playing Chopin on the harmonium.
I’m thinking all my friends on a sofa.
Will they eat each other's hearts out
or add up to a gestalt? I'm thinking
drapes rather than curtains, red neon
rather than candles, triangles rather than
squares, pens rather than pencils,
morsels rather than bits, and actors,
definitely actors. I'm thinking a mock
battle – the Cupids vs. the Toreadors –
with lots of gory lines but no real ending.
It'll be like history. Some get asthma,
some die and graduate, some are
briefly applauded by the woman
with the glossy pitch-black tresses
and believe for a second there
that it all means more than it did.
I'm thinking ships set sail in a bottle.
PREMATURE HALLOWEEN OF THE MIND

As the evening demands answers from its idiot sun
I’m awakened to the distinct possibility of laughter in fate
and the dreaded carrot becomes a tuning fork,
not miraculously but with the after-scent of sulfur.

Truth is now a pin dropped in the chorus,
now a stuffed scarecrow thrashed by invertebrate winds.
The singers snap its scrawny neck on any given Sunday
as the dogs yelp at their fettered ankles bent under cartloads
of fossilized fairytales like heedless children
at play in volcano weather.

It used to be that the only way to cure sight
was through barbaric practices of vision
but we’ve come a long way since Pompeii
and so our final solution is properly scientific.
Here’s a pill to help you tug your ship upriver,
it heals your muscles’ wear and tear.
In no time at all, the patient begins to weep
and run for it, instead of from it, the giant pumkin-
shaped nimbus, the transport to infinity’s succulent shore.

These are prickly times. All things are pointed and radiant
and scratching the glaze of this lunar habitat while the hedgehog
sways its haunches along a dreamed green tunnel.

Its beady eyes see very little but the very little they see
that isn’t really there is supposed to make all the difference.

Is there an Alien napping aboard the womb?

Is it the one that causes things to resonate like seven feline
guitar licks sealed inside a crystal vase,

the one that wallows in such puddles as these?
BORN AND RISEN

I don’t mean to break anyone’s cold sweat here
but I must insist that this is all there is
and no amount of books can fix it.
It’s a note to self, mostly; I’m too tired
to address humanity today. Besides,
it’s no news. We all know this already.
What really concerns me is how I fit into it.
The answer can be found in any movie, of course.
“Just do whatever the others do."
That’s the only stage direction I’ve got so far
and a rotten one at that. I know some people
other than myself who are pretty pissed
about the way this farce keeps trying to typecast them,
woman-mother, man-provider, child-innocent,
and the rest of ‘em horrendous hyphens,
but I think at 1:32 the other night when I stepped
on stage, I neither chose nor was chosen.
It was more of a fluke, as with a cumbersome
lumberjack delivering a much-needed Cesarean.
OK, so it was a rotten piece of luck,
but after the fact someone has to take
all the blame, and all the credit, too,
and I call that person Bob. It’s like ‘God’
but more down-to-earth and easier to remember.
Bob the Lumberjack. A shabby religion, you say.
No love here. Just wood at twenty cents
per cubic meter. Maybe it comes
from the same woods Frost talked about,
maybe not. I mean, who gives a damn,
it’s just wood, right? Whether it comes from the banks
of the Amazon or the heights of imagination
is irrelevant. Wood is all it is and there’s only
so much a child can do with a piece of wood
before it grows frustrated and bored. It doesn’t
spring to life and dance around telling tales
of other places where there isn’t any war
and TV reception is much better. It doesn’t lie.
I mean, lie around is all it does. Until something
happens to it and it becomes a plank, then a gazebo
for languorous goddesses to take cover
from the rain and twist their soaked skirts
until their nectar tingles on my parched wooden lips.
FALL WHERE THERE’S MAY

That untimely picnic when time was running out
on us with the waters draining from the artificial lake
back into the quick river already pushed to frenzy
by melting snow and last week’s rains, it had
too many moments for the few words we spoke.

I blame it all on the sly hand touching the small
of my back and on the ingenious hangover
smearing sunlight all over their faces, so much so
that now I can barely lift them from the landscape,
from the nimbus clouds and birches in white stockings.

We were five, any five, mounting a single blanket
permeated with the smell of confused lovemaking
and the easy, singular silence had its roots
not in some mysterious kind of understanding
but in the shock of our imminent birth to other worlds

and other friends, other hands, perhaps not as sly
but with time enough to achieve their touchdowns
on other blankets with unknowing tiger eyes

until spring tolls and we saddle up again

to be delivered further by the same quick waters.
LOOK OUT, IT’S WEDNESDAY!

I was awakened by the repairman.

He said, “We’ll get to you in no time,”
then he left. Now it seems to me
that spaghetti is the only way to go.

A spider crosses my monitor, asking for it.
Forgiveness. I take it outside and I see
two African men hanging their doormats
to dry on the barbwire fence.

Who said I wasn’t welcome?

I can have it all right here and now,
but I chicken out and go back inside
to surf the web and chat with
my friend in the digs of Manchester
who tells me about this 10-year-old
with an amplifier in his brain,
hardwired by the Americans to think
with deadly precision. A poet, then?
That’s quite a stretch, even for anime,
but last night’s hacker attack on
the Internet’s backbone was real. Apparently,
they were this close to snapping it
in thirteen places. Imagine the gore
and the glory if the mammoth had toppled.

Enough megabytes for twelve winters,
all the friggin’ respect you can eat!

“My god, he’s becoming the red dragon!”

No, I’m just trying to get love
without anyone else being hurt.
“Walk,” the streetlight commands and I obey
like Picasso did (according to Woody Allen),
by placing one foot before the other.

Now that I’m aware of it, though,
it becomes hard, if not impossible,
to keep it up so I stumble sideways into a bar.

If I ever want to get home, I’d better wipe that
poststructuralist gait off with a few beers
and just wing it like normal people do.

The bar has the same bartender and jukebox
and smell of rabid upholstery that it had two years ago
when I was last here, and the same trivia question
frozen on the TV screen, something about
penguins and the NFL. I hate American pop trivia
because it makes me feel stupid
and I hate that because I’m really quite smart
and anything else is a fucking lie. I’m pissed and a little
afraid I might stumble upon someone I know
and I’d have to entertain them with jokes translated
from Bulgarian and they won’t be funny
and I’d end up looking stupid again. I feel trapped.

What started out as a fairly simple going-home exercise
is rapidly turning into bloody parannoyance.

Wait a minute, now I remember! This whole thing
about feeling stupid and insecure didn’t happen to me
but to a friend of mine. No, really. It couldn’t have
been me because I often forget things
and that includes other people’s opinion of me.

Like, once I forgot to eat for about three days
and this other time I forgot that I was supposed to be
at some award ceremony which would have involved some folks
announcing how utterly great I was, imagine forgetting that!

I regret it now, of course, but back then it seemed quite
the thing to do. But don’t give up on me yet, stay with me.

There really was a walking home, and a bar, the same bar
from two years ago. But I didn’t go in – the sameness damned near
killed me! I was spooked, so to speak, because I knew for sure
that my friends from two years ago were not in there
but what if they all somehow happened to be in there?

Then it would have been mighty weird, and I have a weak heart
so I wasn’t ready to take that risk for just a few beers.

I decided I’d be able to make it home sober
even though I was so aware of my walking that
the idea of it made my head plummet like the Hindenburg.

But I’m too much of a man to be broken by a measly theory.
I grin and bear it, and I even come back to class next week for more.
I can walk away from anything! And that includes
a run-on sentence from the likes of Deleuze and Derrida.
I end up home alone, guzzling beer before the dumb
computer monitor, hoping for better company.
I don’t suppose there’s any sense in asking this
from the rain, how it brings out what I need in people
like a favorite painter or a hi-fi tuner with my brain for remote,
not even my brain but its robust fairy godmother,
the one who knows best when to plant what seeds
and has the balls to drill deep, not letting the ruptured cries
of habit stop her from taking me there, the state fair
this amorous hippo careening through paper plains,
the nomadic center of things at once great and alive,
where I’ve always wanted to end up but had honestly no idea.
A MILLIGRAM OF SILVER

the screen watches
the subject’s response

laser beams shot into
diluted camera lens

the pupil swells
with a pride of colors

the brain sends a ping
then a pong

the autopsy is recorded
in the infinite memory

the forceps targets
an unsuspecting audience

we are found once again
to be breathless
What to make of it?

Is it the heart of matter that I’m speaking to
or just the faucet flowing without consequence
in a tub never full enough to satiate a single jaybird?

I’m afraid that, no matter what, this girl will
never know what I mean; she thinks

I’m awkwardly foreign, with a twist maybe,
so how can I tell her about the green dim moon
crushed between the apartment buildings
of my gaseous hometown?

I’ve been hungry without choosing it
but I must make an effort to remember the worse
and as for the worst, I simply can’t.

I’m too tall perhaps, or not religious enough
to be ennobled by suffering.

The point is that even the laughter of
five blonde girls on a rain-drenched parking lot
can’t atone for a damned thing, neither
my own memories nor anyone else’s,
of the shame when my writing
couldn’t follow the party line and swerved
too often into the kind of crystal bullshit
that implied something rotten under the sink
and teachers and parents gulped as if
asked to grow wings and a flaming sword
but how could they? How could anyone,
be moved out of their orbit because of words?
I know nothing about it, all I know is this:
If I hadn’t believed what the fair-eyed stranger
told me that day between the cinder blocks,
I would now be dead. It’s that important.
THE SUN KING

my eyes hurt
from looking out
into the sea where
ships collide as
mistresses to
the sovereign sun
who stings them
with his bastard rays
into tranquil acceptance
and becomes once more
a divider and lover
of the whiteness
of their sails
as any whiteness
is only possible
when he lodges
his arrogant sabers
into the seams of
their impregnable
cargo bays
In this episode the free world
is threatened by a medieval-looking terrorist
who commands an army of droids
all with a very bad aim which the Jedi
dismantle with light sabers of different hues
a full crayon set backed by an army of clones
that all have very good aim
and the action takes place on a wide screen
because there’s such a lot of it
yet the mildew Queen and Anakin Skywalker
manage to squeeze in an eternal love
which never seems to include fucking
or even the promise thereof
because the Jedi religion is for weaklings
who dream of countering school bullies
with their mind powers alone
not ever seeing the more vital
applications of telekinesis like making
love to a thousand planets all at once.
No, the Jedi who are, I’m sorry
to say, just a backwater cult made up of
frigid eunuchs, will simply not do in my galaxy,
this bone-crunching galaxy far
far away from Disney’s tepid morality
and they will all get it in the next episode
when the dark emperor will arise
to ravish us all with his
cloaked electroerotic potency
ANGST RELOADED

The monster roars from its primal source, tongue drawn
far into the throbbing rainforests of the soft palate,
so far, yet so close, to mind that the blond sentry
shivers in his boots and his litany fleets
from the loosened grip of his lips.

The order is now an empty string of words
descended downstairs, a wobbling drunk
who won’t remember the ass he made
of himself that night at the celestial banquet,
how he felt up Venus and threw up on Jupiter
while Saturn and Pluto were bouncing him out.

What we have here is not a graceful feather fall
dampened by tender-tendriled abstractions
but a rough soldierly tumble off the teeth of matter
timed by cuckoo-clocks with oscillating barbs for hands
and none of the tiny solaces normally applied to the skin.

At times like these the jungle stiffens
like a dog-faced buccaneer poised to climb aboard
and turn this truant vessel around while the captain
cowers in the ship’s belly, his cabin door
barricaded by thick volumes about navigation.

As long as the sail is full of wind, the seamen are happy
and the monster becomes their sepia-eyed mascot,
a tiger lying limp and sickly in its own feces.
I am every wind that blows me
but only some of them I call friends.
The others, nature’s failed prototypes, curled in big jars
like centipedes drowned in September’s orange deluges,
they’re all just a hair away from life, this at once
sorry and unapologetic life. All they need to
 crush the cage and turn the blood of their captor
is a given mood and the guts to speak.
DUST IN A TALL GLASS

I live on the edge
of the desert
where the trees are
half-dry and withered
but their other half
is mossy and moist.
Their one side
casts grey shadows
which pile up
into thicker twilight
and bury the grass’s
darkest green
while the other spreads
a soulless shade
soaked in a dazzle
of golden quartzes.
And so my house
has one side
that is fortified
but stands naked
and corroded
on the other,
riddled by a million
desert snipers.
FRANKENSTEIN ON THE BANJO

I smile as the distant lightning photographs me, a star,
a hooded figure on a bike on the glistening night’s road.
I feel like I’ve made a dent already, like I don’t need to explain
any further because I saw someone get it. Yes, the way
her finger bent and her eyes bent inward like a soldier’s
proved that she got it, all of it in a single sitting.
Have I become such a dainty little cupcake?
And if yes, dare I question the tides of happiness
when one such drop is enough to keep me going full throttle
till the horizon caves in and the clouds vandalize the earth?

A lunatic knows everything about calling and nothing about
being heard, he’s the unconquerable bell and whistle
and his orchestra battles on with swarms of intermezzi,
barbarians threatening to extract his one tongue.
That was me the moment before it struck, the gavel
ruling that there is a listener, and a good one
although often fast asleep in the cotton wagon,
traveling west under so many bales that it takes Jericho
or the shepherd’s flute I thought I heard as a child
in an afternoon nap under grandmother’s brilliant cobwebs.

I don’t flatter myself that it’s me she heard.

Nothing I can say can prickle a dolphin’s ear.

Even if I could pour rocks on a maiden’s dulcimer

she’d turn to love the rainer, not the rain.
APHRODITE INSTEAD

Now silence, in building blocks,
forming a pillar. Now
the boot sinks and instead of shattering
comes the twang of bilabial guitars.
Is heard is what I mean.
It’s what we always mean when we say ‘mirror,’
this mirror,
or that one on the wall there,
the bare one with the singed edges
the one that likes to pose as a tunnel.

And now a pair of eyes is begun
by the knitting circle.
We need those eyes to look at the circle knitting
pullovers for eleven stiffs.
This is pure drama.
Pure drama is when you look.
Is heard when you look. Like the flashing
heavens in a slap
before it is begun to burn.
Instant bliss! – if it weren’t for the eyes.

The representation of a horse
on stage is a horse,
it’s how we remember that wisdom smells
of formaldehyde and that gravity
has a widow’s sharp elbow.
In this rivulet we are refreshed
and we trudge ahead, seven fears behind
the blue-eyed belle mounting
whose face we never saw,
always turned to where we assume is forward.

Towers topple, but the show does go on
despite the nakedness
around the aging stripper
and the first row is bent to agree
that age is all about smoke and lighting.
A communal feeling arises as the good doctor
who drops a tear in each eye, and writes
in the margins of his blue notebook:
“We tend to smile. We are tended to weep.
We are (ding-dong!) blessed.”
I WON’T BE EVERYTHING

nil

Nil

Nile, the
tree holds the banks together.

Root structure. Root system.

Born amazed in a splintered cradle,
and terrified every time the drapes
hung freely. It took two millennia
to glue this whole damned thing apart.

Ex-
ex,

x –
The cocoon mantles the imagination.

A cold shivers, aglow in twilight.

In their well-lit headquarters

police are looking for the doer.

Whatever happened has been diagramed.
The crayons at least are crystal-clear.
I
I sat once
I on a lake
in the wake of a holocaust.
It struck me like a blind bat crashing
into a keypad. It wrote ‘z;ogrsp’
which means nothing
can be had for the duration.
Zip this brain up,
we’re going home, where the heart is.

The three parents have two children between them,
like a camel, then Kodak mornings
begin to jelly-roll but the whole thing still
amounts to kissing Angst on the plush sofa.
He is foreign, he must know
every star’s expiration date.
And she is locally pretty. A curve
here and there, a shapely sentence.
It comes third, prodigiously,
and makes an anvil out of everything
until the last thing standing is the first thing.
BLOOD LETTERING

I believe in “god”
because I like the sound of it –
solid as a brick, and with a hole in it
to stick your finger in
like a brick or a bowling ball
only it doesn’t go that far when you throw it.
Or maybe I’m just not the proper athlete.
These muscles can’t be wished into shape, they come to you
like allergies, from the gene pool and the infested
pool near where we often used to play as kids,
where mosquitoes went to whirl
before our faces at night
as if it wasn’t already dark enough
and unforeseeable, where we ran out of new
stories so fast that everything since
has seemed vaguely familiar as if one
can’t ever top that first building block. Yes,
everything seems, even fashion.
I see bits of it hanging from my grandmother’s
slumped shoulders, not enough body
for it to cover, probably how loose garbs were
invented in the First Place. Ah, dear reader,
don’t be afraid! You won’t be taken in
by the vain draft of a poet’s young maple bow,
for you are beastly and magnificent
and your clothes shall fit, *tous les jours.*
Now counting backwards from one:
the pages become an infinite burnt yellow corridor
and collapse back into the front cover,
into the sea storm suspended like a poodle
over saw teeth of gurgling froth.
It’s time to don the skates again, oh, mirror,
mirror, on the floor! You’re mine for now
and I can stuff your cavernous mouth
with anything I please, even roses
or gravel. If I am naked, then so are you
and so is everyone else, and that’s not so bad
then nakedness ceases to mean
and we can move on to better means,
like trying to hug the bus driver. “Let go,
let go of that rudder!” we implore the baffled guy
dressed in the uniform of our desires.
“But how can I let go,” he admonishes,
“without using the proper verb for it?”
and we laugh, gnashing our shiny vocabularies.
No, wait, don’t change the subject again!
Not before it changes itself, and it hasn’t, not yet.

It is as steady as the eye of a gun sight, it says:

“We have to go Zen without the ‘going’

and then we have to get around the ‘doing nothing’
because we can’t, we don’t have the capacity for it,

for this no-verb. Therefore, it sits under no rock

waiting to be gathered in the adroit palms

of generations of meticulous monks

and prepared into a proud herbarium

as something to steer by and be blessed;

it’s not a graveyard in a still place,

it is cumulative in neither space nor time.

It is ours, yet we don’t have it, like dust.

But dust is immaterial unless it’s limestone

or salt on the puckered lips of a desert child –

its worth only measured by turns of the stomach.
‘Don’t tickle my ego,’ I told her, ‘I have better parts.’

She still liked me after saying this, I could tell

by the way light slid off her as it would in glisters

from a submarine surfacing rapidly. In my more chemical

moods, I think of myself as a catalyst, as platinum,

causing nothing to happen, only quickening

what’s already becoming. She is free, then,

bracketed in my embrace, free like the sky-gliding

contexts of children’s chatter, and more ravenous

than the indigo king reigning behind their eyes

stuffing his chest drawers with two kinds of each.

I don’t collect people the way she does, unapologetically

as the cheerful bureaucrat who runs things

but crumbly herself, cannot be held. Yet she does

stick around for another pronged kiss. She thaws.

No, she’s melting, gone. So much the better.

More beer for me, and less having to split

my sentences into two equal parts, both true and false

to my sluggish inner ear, one part unsaid,
it doesn’t matter which. What matters is, I’m afraid
this is too much unrequited fiesta and not enough work,
none of the soothing mahogany monotony
under frozen clocks and the glares of pencil sharpeners
where you don’t have to fake being bored to get sex
or at least a gesture of good will, like, e.g.

_ I’d shag you if it wasn’t only Tuesday. _
REVERSE GARDENING

Once the tenable parasite is recognized for solder,
for the glue that keeps the urn in its semblance of a whole,

for the water that spans and smoothes its fractures
and makes them seem like the natural curve of a woman’s calf

or an inscription that tells of what lies in the coffin,
then it’s no longer possible for pearl divers

to keep diving for just a living, there’s more to it
than timing breaths, and less – there’s love after the fact

like a lucky weed that shoots quick and strong
with airborne roots and a stem driven into the earth,

a fluke not of nature
but of nature’s loneliest loveliest violinist.
XI.

The buck sharpened his stick and immediately
it became his mannerism, his mega-trope
for learning (while the antelope bled)
and for knowing (after he ate its meat)
and even when the sun fell on its back
behind the vanished mangroves
he was at least sure he had always been
exactly a hundred stick’s lengths from home,
his cold and empty cistern
as he willed it, without a touch or terror
or any other totems of the animal he had surpassed,
only a reverberating quietude
inside a tree’s rotting hull
where the sharpening of his tools
was the most accomplished act in town,
his proud gnomish dictionary.
IXI.

Oh, how he suffered by his own hand
while the three worlds were at each other’s throats
and there never seemed to be
enough oxygen, not even
for the rotting to go on indefinitely
and so he gave them Math as a calculator
for diminishing grain, as a gift, as he thought,
because inside she had been pure
and now, outside, she seemed endearing,
an Athena-Palada, an immaculate hunter-seeker.
We all know what happened next. What always happens.
Someone died over and over again until
the chalk repossessed the formulas it had written.

III.

A sore loser revisited the past once
but couldn’t even scratch the surface of the monolith.
His knives broke one after the other
until all that was left was the bare body, sexless,
covered with synonymous bruises and bleeding artifice.
From inside, the petrified fly with the beady eyes saw
hundreds of bodies slump and lose their difference
and in this compost heap, at last – a silhouette!
CLOCKWORM

Forget the adagio, play it by ear.

But the ear yields, it’s no metronome to go by,
and not even the mind can tick with such precision
that each slice of time would be born entire.

OK, so I’m imagining tragedy of it, the odor of
crisp ozone and singed impossibilities rising
like Viking ships to the smoked ceiling, having taken
taken place only in the stylized cinematic sequences
of a girl’s erotic chessboard, the sacred stone circle
where she is allowed to move every piece but the queen.
But this is not an essay, and so I’m allowed to say I’m sorry,
not for not loving, but for wanting to reap tigers
where I’ve sown only question marks, my own riddled riddles,
grey semaphores spun in a cumbersome tango.
I’m sorry that the blue butterfly had to be arrested
in my immobility and I’m doubly sorry
that she escaped so easily, shaking off my traps
as if they were sawdust, as perhaps they are
to a creature of few words.
And just like that day on the scaffold
of a soft-spoken executioner,
it becomes at once too much to bear, and too little,
while somewhere in my guts the clockworm rises again
to overthrow its flustered master.
UGLY LOVE

Now that I’ve crossed out all the dates
on this year’s calendar, the refrigerator stands
starker than ever in its nook and whiteness
begins to descend upon the camera’s eye
until I am awakened to a dream, a ruddy desert
with mangled dunes whose tops are
penciled carelessly in shadowy strokes
like stretch marks or thin-lipped smiles
on a patchwork of faces, and then a voice slithers in:
“Watch love,” it says, like that, without the comma
and without the preliminaries, as if a spirit
is possible without the bottle that contains it,
as if ‘bottle’ is a possible spirit. I’m watching
as the dunes dance in and out of themselves,
their bellies reduced to sharp sines
squirming on a baby’s star-spotted ceiling.
I have been invited to attend an earlier past,
a crossing between theater and museum,
with actors almost alive and nearly dead
each gallantly scrubbing his or her own floor,
the same vast ballroom floor, already clear enough
to reflect diluted silhouettes snatching at
themselves and others in the laboring crowd.
The sight is familiar – an orgy without consummation,
without an end, even in itself.
Fingers clasp fingers across the dividing line
between flesh and glaze and refuse to let go,
dead fingers worn in the hair like shining trinkets,
like milky shadows only visible under red light.
Such is the supreme beauty of Thanatos entwined
in the olive chromes of Nissan’s latest model.
She is silky and untouched, an unlikely muse
for lack of grit and grease. Yet, I will watch her
past the edge of the screen, in the bathroom
where she washes her underwear and swears with spite
wiping sweat from her forehead which spreads
into a cosmos of droplets as it lands and melts
the floor like sulphuric acid, and the shadows connect.
HELLO HOMEOWNER

I’d love it if I had to go on waking
up from myself like Alice or
a sentient tower built from
the ground up and leaning inward
from the winds twirling in my hollow cellars.
I’m talking about stories, of course,
stacked one on top of the other, and always
the topmost inhabited by jolly fire dancers
whose stomping flamingoes keep the beat
and whose steps echo more and more
as one descends the stairs to older floors
where there isn’t enough flesh to
dampen the naked rustle
of brick layers compressing into place.

I watch my younger selves get it on
on the cigarette-burnt carpet rubbing heads
like the two hammers of a glockenspiel
resting together in a clown’s glossy pocket.
It must be full of tarred & feathered stars in there,
it must be a celestial orgy. They lick
newly-found unease from each other’s fingers –
their is the hunger that comes after hunger
to occupy a familiar closet space.
It has a dazzling egg for brains
and each of its raindrops is rain.
DRESS REHEARSAL IN THE PYRENEES

I get on with it, it’s like damp clothes,
like having to change after
a field trip to the museum,
after having seen the fossilized tablets
and wished to forge them
so they’d read closer to home:
‘Thou shall kill, and love it!’

Today is laundry day and by that I mean
it’s been altogether too long. I have
no decent pair of socks left, and I welcome this
opportunity to be indecent, the trick is
to find someone to do it with, barefoot or not,
ties optional. It really doesn’t matter what
I get messed up in, so long as the cradle rocks
and fat guitars twang by the fire.
I’m a fan of my own band, I support it by
singing along. And here’s to all the tall women
stiffening their seasoned hips behind me.
I know I’m no Jim Morrison.
I’m only the sum of my hearts.
MOVING PICTURES

When the beacon shifted to an altogether different rhythm
and dolphins began to invade the blue wound opening on screen
some of my bareback riders were thrown off phase,
their chatter broke into hiccups, they couldn’t get with it,
the slow, mindful thing, not tonight when there’s still plenty of marrow
fermenting in the tall glasses and matador eyes gleam
with bull-fire.

I suppose each of us learns against his or her
better judgment the way kites soar always leaning
on sloping winds, or maybe not that way at all.
Whatever gusto ripples through our faces is just that, the rumble
of things colliding in thick moonshine in the atmosphere,
sore elbows rubbed against the possibility of love.

The lesson is a quick cat tiptoeing across canvas, its own
egg and Columbus, its own cavernous cleverness.
We see it move about, never quite between the rock
and the hard place where we lie in wait. And again we
smite each other instead and laughter springs like confetti
soaked in the blood of a likeable henchman, coloring each of us
differently, or maybe just me, the I that watches
with such ravenous intent that it’s becoming
queasy with so much becoming.
FIRST ONE’S FREE

Since I can’t paint worth a damn
here’s an idea for a painting
for those of you who can paint
but can’t think of anything
worth a damn:
A dirt road divides a sallow savanna landscape
into two uneven parts, say, left and right.
A man staggers off into the distance
doubled over under the weight of
an angel’s shadow, so much so
that his spine seems reptilian, while
a woman in a blue bonnet and a flower-printed dress picnics just off the road with her
back to the man, nibbling at a horseshoe.
The two are somehow related
but we don’t know how exactly.
Maybe through cause and effect
or maybe through their names
bumping L’s in the phone book.
On the horizon there are two towers,
one is big, the other one bigger,

almost obnoxious, and a bit crooked like

an index finger. Above the towers the sun

is nothing more than a sloppy circle,

more of an ellipse, as quick and negligible

as a wren’s iris. A hovering pulse.
VITA

Plamen Arnaudov was born on April 8, 1978, in Sofia, Bulgaria. He grew up in Bourgas, Bulgaria, where he attended “Geo Milev” English Language Medium School. In the spring of 2000 he got his bachelor’s degree from the American University in Bulgaria and was accepted to the graduate program in creative writing at Louisiana State University that same fall.