

n o l i m i t s . n e w r e a d e r s .

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Reunion

and other spoken word poems

Gerard Wozek

Gerard_Wozek **Reunion** and other spoken poems



Author's Biography

Gerard Wozek's first book of poems, *Dervish* (Gival Press 2001), won the Second Annual Gival Press Poetry Prize and received a Violet Crown Special Citation from the Writer's League of Texas and Barnes and Noble Booksellers. His poems and prose have appeared in such magazines as *Blithe House Quarterly*, *The Harrington Gay Men's Fiction Review*, *Chiron Review*, *Utreict*, *Bay Windows*, *Amethyst*, *White Crane Journal*, *The Prairie Street Companion*, and *the River Oak Review*. His poems have also appeared in several anthologies including, *Gents*, *Bad Boys and Barbarians: New Gay Male Poetry* (Alyson Publications, 1995), *Reclaiming the Heartland*, (University of Minnesota Press, 1996), *Queer Dog*, (Cleis Press, 1997) and *Bend Don't Shatter: Poets on the Beginning of Desire* (Soft Skull Press, 2004). His verse play, *The Changeling's Exile* which premiered in Chicago in 1992, was later published as a limited edition chapbook (Deep Wood Press, 1996). In 2003, Wozek received a Finalist Grant Award in Poetry from the Illinois Arts Council for selections from an unpublished manuscript entitled *Lost Saints*. Wozek teaches creative writing at Robert Morris College in Chicago.

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Preface

For nearly a decade, poet Gerard Wozek has collaborated with Chicago visual artist Mary Russell in the creation of award winning poetry videos that have played around the world. From screenings in San Francisco, California and Brisbane, Australia to festivals in Berlin, Germany and Vancouver, Canada, the artists have attempted to create a body of work that reflects a seamless merging of text and vision or what artist Kurt Heintz calls, "an aural literacy."

The first videopoems were initiated by poetry luminaries Anne Waldman, Bob Holman, and Allen Ginsberg, as part of the Manhattan Poetry Video Project. Situated somewhere between installation art and music video, poetry video is an evolving genre with no limits to its dynamic vision and potency. It is the perfect marriage between visual image and the spoken and written word that allows cinema and poetry to merge and create a new vision. When a resonant image couples with the poet's text, a kind of alchemy occurs between the two disciplines of poetry and film. The visual images often deepen the meaning or find new alliances with the inherent metaphors of the word. Stills, animation, computer graphics, and filmed imagery, can all broaden and enhance the experience of the listener/viewer. With the addition of music or other complementary sounds, the experience can be a striking and welcome alternative to traditional poetry recitals.

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Many of the hundreds of people who have seen the filmic work of Wozek and Russell have requested written copies of the actual verse contained within the poetry videos. "Reunion" is an e-book collection of some of Wozek's spoken word poems, including several works which are currently in production. The poetry video "Elemental Reels" can be viewed online at the Popcorn Q cinema at www.planetout.com with more films to be archived online at the "Videothèque" located at the e-poets.network website. More information about the poet can be found at www.gerardwozek.com.



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The Spirit Compass

1. East

How do we begin
to learn how to translate
this unutterable lightness,
this floating upwards,
this soaring into,
this becoming weightless,
transparent, holy,
necessary as air?

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2. West

The body remembers,
holds the sweetest memory
of when we were pure,
as if we never passed
through this life.
Now, we have to use
everything we know
in order to reclaim
ourselves as an arrow,
a whirring dart,
a spear tearing through
the fiercest wind.
Only to come back
to our first impulse
to be held.

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3. North

You said you would travel
with me You said
you would make the pilgrimage.
Go a thousand steps
up the steep incline.
Travel a hundred miles
without water or sleep. You said:
"I can't do this without you?"
A sanguine heart,
your fervent wish
to be remembered,
and a clutch of yellowing letters,
is what I'm bringing
to the temple alone.

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4. South

The altered vision
is the secret happiness.
The lark wavering
on the crest of a hill,
her nest securely hidden
amid the blossoming
spring branches.
Across the meadow
I can still see
the cottage we built
in our minds.
I know somehow,
we inhabit it. Invisible,
your breath hovering
over the staircase,
the wrinkled bedsheets.
Upstairs, the bees
have left their harvest
behind a hollow doorframe.
The walls are still warm.
If we enter through
the broken panels,
we can taste
what they've left
just for us.



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The Rosary Walk

1.
The unborn embryos,
two milky pearls
preserved in clear
formaldehyde,
are unnamed.
How do they manage
to still turn
in a kind of dance?
They waver
with all their pining,
unvanquished pang
still held in tact.
No singing here
but rather, the thud
and slow scraping
of their frozen fingers
on the side of a glass jar.
And if some music
could be born from
their open mouths,
would they say,
Live for me? Live
in spite of me,
but live.

2.
I wanted to dance.
To wrap my toes
in Japanese silk.
Tufts of doe down
to break the grace
of a pirouette.
But I'm beset
by that boy
who once was me.
His dead weight
crushes any chance
for a pulse here.
How can it be
I still harbor him?

This tremor in my throat.
this tremble, palpitation.
How to purge
these dwarfed impulses
these stillborn things
moving inside of me.
As if an explication
of his greedy mourning
would do any good.
But not even this poem
has the capacity
to resist despair.

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3.

Sprinkle holy water
on a gravestone
and every transgression
is divinely resolved.
Redemption, they say,
derives from a priest.
But this afternoon
I walk a different path
to genuflect in the grace
of moth and worm,
the tightly shut petals
of the hesitant August lily.
Deeper into the woods,
a whickering owl's
mournful screech, causes
me to pass my hand
over my heart
in a kind of blessing.
I wait for what seems to be
a skip in my pulse or
an angel passing. Fey
to still believe
in such creatures I know.
But for a moment
I am certain I've returned
to my wanton ways,

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to walk unclothed, kiss
the rough bark. I want to
recapture my sins,
the pungent roots of them,
with no intention of ever
surrendering them up.



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4.

Say that we be wild.
Say that our tongues
follow pulse.
Say that we be shoe skates,
blades on ice.
Say we, say we.

Say snow melting on eaves.
Say doorframe, say window.
Say tidepools on the beachwalk,
say thunderclap, say fog.
Say that all
this here is ours.
Say let go.

Say we cherish the tremor,
the inkling, the rudderless
thoughts that propel us together.
Say we divine the earth's sweet tones.
Say we stoke the night with paens
and hymns to the unseen hand.
Say goodnight. Goodnight.

Say we be mourners
at our own graves.
Say we reconcile
all the lost moments here,

before we stop breathing.
Say we go out with sparklers,
with deep kisses and cake.
Say yes, say now.
Say we left something here
that mattered. Say it was good.
Say something of you lives on.
Say something of me.

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5.

Don't tell me it all ends.
Here with this dirge, this garland
of white roses. Let me make
a pagan's necklace of them.
I'll have one last dance
around the maypole
until it gets too dark to see.
Then I'll sit and watch
all the houselights go on
lit by lives I imagine to be happy.
I can still see the neighborhood,
the house I wanted to own,
but never lived in. Broken trellis
and the rusted porch swing.
The face looking out from
the widow's peak window.
Give me another step,
another chance to weave roses
into something that resembles
a string of uncontrolled fire,
Saturn's brave halo,
the red wing of a hummingbird
hovering above
our gaping mouths.

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Elemental Reels

1. Air

Not the bird itself
but a place for wings.
Not the nebula
but a place
for enormous light.
Before the snows,
before the stars arrived,
before branches
etched the sky,
the spirit-bird lived,
making heaven and earth its nest.
Invisible, you feel it.
A promise, a portent,
A sparrow not seen.
It is the urge to soar,
to whirl lavishly.
Listen for the trill
thimble-song in your heart.
The gods there, wide awake,
growing wise.



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2. Fire

Take this mouth, I want
to breathe you.
This tongue, I want to sing you.
These fingers, I want
to inhabit you.
This skin, this hair.
My beloved, do you see,
I am you.
Can we? Can we enter
this heat unarmed?
Attest to this spark, courageous?
Can we walk into the blue center
until we are nothing
but ash, coal turning
to essence, wind?

3. Earth

You want to tell this story?
Then take heart.
Let these trees carry your ravings.
Let this field keep your rhythm.
You want to tell this story
Write it here on your face,
on your lover's body,
on this fingertip of time.
You want to tell this story?
Become the protagonist
in your own mystery.
Leave behind these safe walls.
Abandon familiar highways.
Enter the unknowable.
Befriend danger.
Ruin your reputation.
Live on instinct.
Carry nothing
but your willingness
to risk everything.
You want to tell this story?
Then listen.

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4. Water

Where do the colors go?
Is this my hair, my eyes at last?
Who will lead me
over the dance floor?
Who will want me
in their arms now?
Tell me, what is tenderness?
Desire? And again, what is a kiss?
How shall I dress for this bed,
this early chill, ragged night?
Remind me how that song went.
The rhapsody. How did it go?
And that old waltz step
I once knew by heart
How did it go?
How did I go?

Who will take my hand
at the final parting?
Can I surrender
all the things I have learned
to cherish? How will it be
when I finally shut my eyes?

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5. Light

We are strong to dance again,
we are strong to whirl again,
In beauty, in shimmer,
we are strong to come again.



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When Verdi Sings: Three Haiku

Author's Note: Verdi is a caged bird kept by my artistic partner Mary Russell. The videopoem that resulted from this collaboration was an honoring of his existence.

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The tremor of wings
fluttering in translation,
whisper of dead trees.

Twilight in the cage,
brings elongated shadows,
pulse of open sky.

Voices become clouds.
The only sanctuary
a drape of flowers.

**A Bird in Hand:
Thirteen Postcards from Paris**

a force de prier il se fait un archange"
("by sheer dint of prayer, he makes himself an
archangel")

Maria Rainer Rilke

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n o l i m i t s . n e w r e a d e r s .

1.

Sometimes I can't remember
why I ever came here.
Was it falling in love
with the Technicolor choreography
of Leslie Caron and Gene Kelly?
Edith Piaf's chorus
to the French Legionaries.
Jacques Brel tunes?
Or Catherine Deneuve singing
in the Umbrellas of Cherbourg?
I stand on the tourist overlook,
on the rooftop of the Samaritaine,
and look out over the spires,
the hazy rooftops.
If I put my hand over the railing,
I can feel that gust of air
beneath the pigeons' wingspan,
then like those birds, I descend
over the sooty tree branches,
the rain scarred church domes,
the statues of royalty
that line the old bridges. I dive in
and out. Feel the giddy spin
in my belly. Float unnoticed.
That's me eating chocolat praline glace
on the Ile St. Louis, lost
in the rose gardens at Bagatelle,

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jumping over Metro turnstiles,
scribbling notes on bon bon wrappers.
I swoop over the Latin Quarter,
now the crowded boulevard,
now the famous river. See how
my hands are made into feathery things?
Now to the tip of the Eiffel Tower.
Now the sky.

2.

I can't say exactly
what I've given myself over to.
Childhood's desire perhaps?
A wish to be carried along
by impulse or driven
by divine whimsy.
Little vagabond. Little thief.
I shoplift postcards off the racks
at Les Halles and mail them
to my one room flat
on the rue de Casablanca.
I'm in Paris to study the movement
of pedestrians along the Champs-Elysees,
to fill my pen cartridge
with the glint of sun on pond water
at the Luxembourg Gardens,
to measure the length
of the falling chords



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of the choir boys at the Sacred Heart,
to lose myself in the taste
of warm baguettes,
and Sunday markets, and ringing bells.
I'm here to calculate
how long it takes
for a penitent's candle to burn
at the foot of St. Genevieve.

3.

I lost my passport
on a train ride back from Amsterdam.
A typical crisis.
I cashed in all my traveler's cheques,
tried to erase the expiration date
on my work visa. Collect back pay
from the language institute
where I had been teaching English,
but I'm a fugitive now. In order
to pay the rent on my studio
in the fifteenth arrondissement,
I post an ad in a Franco-American
newspaper offering cheap massages.

Man to man rubdowns. Hand
to back therapy. The gentlemen
call for their appointments.
We barter a price. I go to their houses,

sometimes I get lost.
They show me their bedrooms.
They take off their shirts.
I uncap the oil. Sometimes
there's a flame from a candle,
an incense stick, sometimes
a curtain blowing. I close my eyes
when my hand first touches
their necks. The smooth curve
of their spines. Taut muscles.
Tattooed arms. I move
my palms over their hard bodies.
I press into them. They tell me
it's like music. Sometimes
I get lost.

4.

Dear little prince of Paris.
Dear little beast. Dear little painter
on acid. Dear little shell.
Dear sprite on the cobblestones.
Dear little fey. Dear dogwood
blossom bobbing in the fountain pool.
Dear hash pipe in a garden in Montemarte.
Dear hustler at Pigalle.
Dear bleach blonde rentboy on St. Denis.
Dear little crook. Dear little poet.
Dear empty stomach on the Metro.

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Dear aching fingers. Dear song
on the stones of the Jewish quarter.
Dear purple geranium on the windowsill.
Dear moon in the puddle.
Dear little wings. Dear little pierrot.
Dear crooked barstool in the Bastille.
Dear stone in my shoe. Dear April wind
barking on my face. Dear cochon du lait.
Dear little galaxy collapsing within.

5.

Madame Janette reads tarot cards
in her trailer just east
of the Bois du Bologne.
She holds up the Prince of Cups
and says in broken English:
"Drink in the world poet.
Fill your vacant chest with le monde."
So I eat up Paris. Steal crème brulee
tarts from the boulangerie.
Get drunk on sugared espressos.
Flirt with café garçons. All harmless
enough. I walk on top of bridge railings.
Walk out of Bon Marche
without paying for an expensive suit.
Write an epic poem about a musician
named Francois
who I meet at the supermarche.

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Fall in love with Francois,
his violin, his lips. Imagine moving in
with Francois who plays violin
for the French National Symphony
in order to write operas together.
Discover Francois is really Francine
living as Francois. Write an epic poem
about living incognito. Live inside
my studio for a week,
trying to read the lips
of American soap opera characters
who've been dubbed into French.
Everything gets lost in translation.
We're all duped by what we think
we're all saying. I try to fill my cup.
Gulp down the world. But nothing
fills the space inside my rib cage.
I mean to find the tiny crack there
where everything leaks out.

6.

At night along the Seine,
I ride the Bateau Mouche
with the tourists
and try to pretend
I'm new here.
The colored lights shining
from the hull of the boat,



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gleam over the river
and illuminate lovers
as they lean into each other.
Sometimes I see a couple kissing
under a bridge or on a bench.
From behind a clump of bushes
someone's buttoning up a shirt.
For a moment, in the ship's light,
every gesture of desire
is exposed. They move into
each other, so gracefully.
The piped in English guide
points out the must see markers
for sightseers: the Notre Dame
where Quasimoto stood,
the Conciergerie that imprisoned
Marie Antoinette. But I watch
for lovers along the banks.
I wish I were. I wish.

7.

I like to drink tea
at a salon in the Marais.
I like to cup my hands
around a steaming brew
of chicory and lemongrass.
I like to stare at the neat
rows of tea bags with exotic names

like "Eros" and "Kenya,"
"Marco Polo" and "Sphinx."

I like to watch the young boys dressed
in starched collars and expensive ties
serve the luminous china plates
filled with shortbreads and wedges
of raw honeycomb. Look at how
they place the silver tea leaf chambers
so delicately inside the porcelain pots
to steep. I steep
inside the Wedgwood too.

The water changes to amber.
Talk at other tables becomes
a swarm of bees humming.
Oh, the alchemy of a tisane.
I am turning to red sienna.
I am infusing with the dark
secret of tea leaves:
Vanilla bourbon,
Darjeeling, Butterscotch.
I am brewing in an ancient kettle.
I am malt and flower and balsam.
I am copper, chestnut, and forest.
I am medicine for sipping.

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8.

There is a sauna near the Bourse.
A quiet hammam. I like to watch
the men there. See them
easy with one another.
See them take off their terry cloth
robes. Watch them languish
in whirlpools. They stretch
on mosaic slabs. Wet Jerusalem
marble. They lather
with black Moroccan soap.
Scrub with bristly mitts.
Eucalyptus air fills our lungs.
I vanish. Become smoke.
Become atmosphere. Equalized
in the steam, the naked yogurt maker
from Lyon addresses the long nosed
tycoon from the Madeline district.
I watch them. All instinct and sweat.
I am the damp air they breathe.
I'm the mint leaf running
through their veins. Tremor
in their fingertips. Now my skin
turns to water. My hands
turn into mist. My bones, fog.

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9.

Patron saint of thieves.
Guide to every traveler.
Mercury. Mercurius.
If you can hear me,
perched as you are atop
the Place de la Bastille.
Help me put the world together.
Trumpet at the crossroads.
Messenger of the gods. Keep me
in your fold. Hermes. Thoth.
I'm trying to write down my life.
Cast my breath out in sentences.
I send postcards to myself.
Make poems out of the minutes.
Little sparks from the caduceus.
Winged heels. What would it be
if I exchanged everything into words?
What would happen
if I told myself the truth?

10.

I'm homesick. I spend days
walking around
the Jardin des Plantes
humming to the peonies,
minding the dahlias,
staring at the mute elephants.



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I watch a stray cat perched
above a reptile cage,
daring to leap in.

I should leap too. I should be
translating the hieroglyphs
on the Obelisk of Luxor.

Meeting friends at Quetzal
in the Marais. Drinking Pernod
or dancing with some guy
named Marius, or Gilles, or Pierre.
I don't go dancing.

I sulk. I meander. I brood.
I'm bad company. I'm gruff
with the woman who folds
my Nutella crepe. I snarl
at the tourist asking for directions
to the Jeu de Palme
I eat takeout Chinese
on the terrace at the Tuilleries.
I turn into shrubbery. A statue
on a railing. Then ponder
my fortune cookie's fortune:
"Change cities,
but drink from the same well."

11.

I got on the Paris Metro
this morning when the sun
was still out, and stayed
underground all day.
Got off at the Chatelet interchange
and sat in the station for hours
watching people. The herd moving
through the dank tunnels.
I try to follow them. Try to act
as though I have a purpose too.
But their path doesn't hold me.
I've lost my client list.
My phone is disconnected.
My suit is torn
and has fallen out of fashion.
I take the metro
all the way to the end.
Get off and change
to another destination.
But the city is eating me now.
My hands are all bones. All callus
and ache. Instead of open palms,
I'm all fists. There's no room
to hold anything that breathes,
to soothe anything
attempting to fly.

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12.

Everyone visits Pere Lachaise.
But the section of the cemetery
where men wait to have sex
in the open mausoleums
isn't on any tourist map.
They're lined up, waiting for someone
to kneel down in front of them,
or put a mouth over their own.
And when I wander up
to breathe into one of them,
offer something that resembles a kiss,
I think to myself, perhaps
I'm saving him. Maybe my breath
is filling his lungs
and bringing him back.
But it doesn't. He steals my air.
He drains my blood. He makes me
a corpse. A shadow in a doorframe.
A lily on Gertrude Stein's headstone.
A rosary of dried amaryllis
on Oscar's grave. I'm the dust
motes that fall over this yard
of granite names. I'm the gray
drizzle in the gutter.
Sullen ghost. Angel of ash.

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13.

I'm leaving you dear city,
and you'll forget I was ever here.
Dear little streetlamp.
Dear little dream.
One exchanges a prayer
for these souvenirs:
swollen fingers, broken shoes,
poems scribbled on postcards.
Memory. Ache.
Goodbye Place des Vosages.
Goodbye Hotel deVille.
Goodbye Concorde. Goodbye
labyrinth of streets, and skins.
When I get home, my friends
will look for gifts, key chains
from the Eiffel Tower or dishtowels
with Toulouse Lautrec prints on them.
If anyone wants to see
what I've brought back,
I'll give them my hands.



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Metro Haiku

Author's Note: "Metro Haiku" blends the traditional Japanese poetic form with a minimalist's vision of urban life. The video produces a kind of dissonance between a poet's more traditional view of nature, and the gritty milieu of city rhythms. The speaker's attempts to rejoin with the natural world are juxtaposed against a backdrop of fragmented alienation.

Ivy on granite,
purple leaves turn to powder.
Sap vines still supple.

Dust swirls in the sky,
buildings on the horizon.
Clouds obscure the spires.

Traffic din at dusk.
Whirlybirds catch in gutters,
float on briefcases.

Sliver of a moon,
rises above city light.
Shimmer on new ice.

Pale sky, early frost,
tree blossoms chilled to parchment
Petals take to sky.

Dance of the Electric Moccasins

Crush the buttons into a fine powder.
Steep the larger pieces in a cup
of strong peppermint tea and stir
the remaining sugary dust into this steaming brew.
Here, let me help you. You don't need to rush this
or gulp it down. This isn't like getting drunk
on Stoli and burning kerosene drums in the canyon.
This is about dancing into lightning.
This is about merging
with what the leaves are dreaming.

You'll need to wander in the prairie
for a while, so put on these moccasins.
They're warm and sturdy
and nothing will harm you in them.
See the little pebbles
sewn onto the heel, the smooth beads
made from wind, the laces
made from willow whips? After a while,
you'll forget you're wearing them
and they will feel like the soles of your own feet.

Don't worry, I'm going to hold your hand
as we descend into the basin. At first,
you'll be unsteady, it's going to be
like a kind of half-sleep. But you've come
this far already, so don't be afraid.

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I'm going to keep a vigil with you.
I'll be right here next to you,
though you may not see me. I'm going
to stay awake while the spirit guides come for you.

Breathe. Now deeper. It's safe here. That's it.
You can let go now. Become conditioned
to a different layer. Merge into another
version of time.

I think you can walk on your own now,
so I'll release your hand and you can become
the hiss of bee drone. You can begin to know
what the arbutus is whispering to Jupiter.
Become the froth of cascade over smooth rock
or the rain pearl sleeping in the core
of a lilac bud. You can linger here,
like the fragrance of evening juniper
and evergreen, like the sticky sap
on a cypress trunk, like the silver
and pink cape of the coyote at dawn.
You can be this. For a little while now.
You can be.

A bat might ask you to raise your wings
and take in the sky. A spider might spin
you out as a web to hold bewildered prey.
A mountain might ask you to fall

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as snow onto faraway peaks.
A gust of wind might kiss you brazenly,
a cloud might offer you its tongue.

But you'll dance. You'll dance
the way milkweed silk glides
across an open meadow alive
with grasshoppers and moon dust.
You'll dance the way pelicans levitate
above the river. The way blackberries
and squash seeds are taken up
by the pulse of that cool flowing water.
You'll dance.

This is a dance of impulse.
A dance of feathers. Of sparks.
This is a dance where you forget
your body and become vibration.
Where you become the essence of libido,
pulse of the earth, primordial throb.
You already know the steps,
you already know the rhythm and the pull.
What is there to master, but the letting go,
the acceptance of this deeper music?

After a while, you will wake into a sleep
and you will forget this dreaming again.
But wait. What is the fire in your veins



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telling you? What have you brought back
from this journey? To know how to spin
into nothingness. To know what the ancient
canyon walls know and all the hidden treasures
they contain. To have stepped into light
and soared.

Let me kiss you. Help you remember
your fingers, your forehead, your lips.
For a moment you might think you're falling
from a ladder. Your stomach might lurch
and you might feel a wave of grief
move through you. It's like learning
your name again, how to tell time, how to walk.

Lean into me, you're still safe.
And tomorrow, we'll go dancing together,
and your most treasured wish,
that unspoken secret of yours,
will take you where you want to go.

At Dusk: A Triptych

1. Fireflies

I want to imagine
that the bombs falling
over the city of Najaf
are something other
than what they are.
From a distance
I could pretend
they are simply falling stars
or even harmless fireflies
circling the moon
with their amorous code.
When we were children
we followed the dance
of the lighting bugs
out into the summer dusk.
We invented games
where we would rescue
each other from spells,
unfreeze our rigid bodies
from becoming statuary,
or tag each other
with invisible wings.
We had no vocabulary then
for the machinery of war.
No comprehension
of the notion of carnage,

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of artillery warehouses,
or friendly fire.
We only understood
the rules of dusk.
That the object of the game
was to locate each other's
silver outline at nightfall,
find each other's pulse,
and stay warm and breathing,
as we chased
the glowing wicks of fireflies
that lured us into the darkness.

2. The Mercury Hour

The whole world has slipped
into a kind of twilight.
Caught in those tenuous minutes
when the sun has vanished
and everything seems
to be lit from within.
There is a kind of fragility
about everything, as though
we could all fall quietly
through a tear in the veil
and be swallowed into dust.
They say that Mercury
presides over such a time
and when I look to find evidence
of this slippery god's presence,

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I see that some child
has sketched a stick figure
in chalk on the sidewalk
in my neighborhood.
But this curious face has been
drawn without a mouth.
An oval head containing
two astonished eyes
and strands of stiff hair.
The figure traced in grey
is unable to tell their story.
So I try to speak, reveal
what must be going on
as it stands mute
against the drone of traffic,
amid the storm of flickering
television lights strobing
through suburban windows.
I fumble at how to tell
of this furtive hour
when two realms meet.
A fragile body
stranded in a small
Midwestern town,
unwilling to be obliterated
by the sweeping shadows
that seek to obscure,
nearly erase this imperfect
human figure.



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3. A Love Poem

I want to write
a simple love poem
but there is nothing
simple about this:
the trail that leads
from one man to another.
I imagine the map
that one Iraqi soldier
keeps folded in his helmet.
On it is a path traced
from his dozing camp
in Fajullah to a U.S. post.
somewhere on the outskirts
of this shelled out town.
His desire is so great
he is willing to dart through
minefields and barbed wire.
At dusk, he meets in secret
with an American Marine.
In a corner of the sergeant
major's empty bunker,
quietly together
and without restraint,
they curl into each other's arms
and for a moment
lapse into a dream
where there are no weapons

no stealth bombs or fighter planes.
In the morning there is no trace
of their covert affair.
They return to their positions
armed and ready
to destroy on command,
pitch lethal grenades,
into the dust clouded light
at a target called the enemy.

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Invocation

"The Green Man is that spirit energy, presence, inherent in every cell of the vegetative realm, and transmitted to the animal/human realms through the foods we eat, the flowers we smell, the trees we hug."

Dr. Kathleen Jenks

With the psalm of the fiddlehead
fern and the treble of the green finch.
With the wash of pond water
against the flagstone edge
of the reedy bank. With the stem
core of an oak leaf and the brown
sheen of an acorn resting in the grass
of our favorite, faraway knoll:
Let the Green Man come and thrive.
Let the Green Man be fertile and grow.

With the soft hushed hum
of the hidden beehive and the urgent
cicada overhead. With the trace
of breathless shadow at nightfall
and the secret path left by coyotes
and wandering deer. With fallen
buckberries and the shed cocoons
of wild butterflies. With the whisper
of coveted wishes made on the floating

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silk of freed dandelions in the wind:
Let the Green Man emerge and linger.
Let the Green Man dance and frolic.

With the hieroglyphic scribble
of lichen laced on pebbles
and the riddle solved
in the pattern of pine needles
strewn along an overgrown trail.
With the force that opens
the milkweed pods and tiger
lilies and the atoms that meld
the hawthorn leaves into a glowing face:
Let the Green Man speak and answer.
Let the Green Man flourish and reign.



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Reunion

Let this moment
arrive like a turbine
falling through the sky.
Like a dog yelping in heat.
Like a wave of solace
seeking it's level in me.
Arrive the way the bride
and bridegroom clouds merge,
the way the wind forms
a perfect lip of sand
upon the dune's reef.
The gull calling
for twilight, for sleep.

Arrive the way a dreamer,
melancholy and shaken,
gropes in the dark
to return to the dream.

Arrive as the melody
latent in the tongueless bell.
Arrive as the ocean storm,
urgent like the birth pulse.
Arrive the way desire streams
out of the trill of a finch.
The way jade breathes
through a willow leaf,

verdant, supple,
then as mottled yellow,
then dust.

Arrive the way light
may suddenly pour
into a scar blind eye.
Arrive the way
one suddenly remembers
their mother's scent,
the crease of her hand,
her stifled tears.

Arrive like balm,
like ancient medicine,
like the purge of fever.

Arrive as a lover does
searching his beloved's nape,
as a muzzle of sea wind,
the jewelry of new desire.
Arrive as a pearl of sweat,
tug in the belly,
a break in the voice.

Arrive like a feather falling
on an old monk's shoulder.

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Arrive as the quality
of atmosphere
in a late September forest,
the trail diverted, then lost,
arrive as the compass within.

Arrive as the outline
of a presence felt
but not seen.

Arrive the way a sojourner arrives,
knowing she's been here before.

Arrive as the crocus bulb
marrying the fertile soil
and dung.

Arrive the way one reaches
to feel the missing watch
on a wrist, the grooves left on a finger
from the absent wedding ring.

Arrive as unnoticed as air,
the next breath taken for granted,
somehow assumed, assured.

Arrive the way
all the stories say
the prophets arrive,
as a stone rolled back from a tomb

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or a thunderclap, or a tree
on fire in the wasteland.

Arrive as though
you've never been gone,
as though you never abandoned
the penitent poets. Arrive
as though there is more than lament.
Arrive as though
there never was famine
or blight or the cynic's curse.
Arrive to confound,
to deepen the mystery. Arrive
impossibly, imperceptibly.
Arrive on the ravishing wheel
of birth and life.

Arrive from beneath the ardor
of lavender, from beyond the logic
of the elements or gravity,
From where the celestial dippers pour
into the vast and holy.
Arrive from where the prayer wheels
of shattered light
spin off the snowy glaciers,
dizzying Jehovah, calling out
over distances
to the desert lilies to bloom.



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**Earth Song
for Digory**

I pulled over on the side
of the road because the rain
was hitting my windshield
so hard I couldn't see.
I put my poncho over
my head and stepped out
into the hard cold pellets
striking against my raingear.
I entered a tight grove of trees,
a few birch and mountain ash,
and touched the branch of one
tall oak that must have been
planted a hundred years ago.
Everything smelled of iron
and fertility: the buckthorn
and the prairie grass,
the Queen Anne's lace
bent over from the moisture.
I stood and saw the foggy
headlamps of cars skidding
down the slick highway,
my ear pressed to the wet
tree bark. For a moment
I thought I could hear
the sap singing to me:
to exist only for now,

to have all the mystery ahead
of you still, to be growing
wilder and as graceful
as these stoic trees
you almost passed by.

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