

Trouble

“Anstett is a jackass.”
—Hilda Crump



Aaron Anstett

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Some of these poems first appeared in the following publications, to whose editors I am grateful:

21 Stars Review

Copper Nickel

Dispatx

Dusie

Fine Madness

River Styx

Word For/Word

Many thanks to Susana Gardner and all of the Dusie chapbook project participants.

HOMELESSNESS

A long way the blood runs, utterly dark inside the body.
Under no moonlight, field mice scurry on snow,
script of their paw prints unscrolled.

A plane's black box awaits what
disaster befalls. How many voices now
trembling on payphones?

Such violets and umbers at sunset, vanishing.
In Wisconsin, a snapped television cable
must still slap the house's siding in wind.

The day-laborer's wrist bones ache
to the elbows. Physics or no, shovels grow
no lighter with lifting.

Imagine your dainties
rinsed in the convenience store sink.
And then you wring.

I drank in that town's good bar many nights.
The one library held one copy
of the book of antique photographs and accounts.

TROUBLE

“The sleepers are very beautiful as they lie unclothed.”
–Whitman

If we trouble each sleeper, house to house and room by
room,
ditches to hotel beds, propping our lit lamps

to their sudden, jack-o-lanterned expressions, and ask
who burnt insects with sun and a magnifying glass,

how many glasses of water in that fast-moving cloud,
what is it sloshes inside us like iced drinks on the boat’s
deck

as some intermittent music, wind chimes or sirens,
drifts from the floating casino ablaze as the candelabrum

of nerve ends in the wakened sleeper’s fist, if we ask
what of it if it got wet instead of dark at night, not damp,

but gallons, and it’s happening, in Fiji and Nebraska, quiz
which they’d be then: millionaire or tugboat captain,

gracious bingo champ or rope company rep, please clarify
your answers, we should nearly whisper so as not to rouse
them.

UNDRESSED

for N.

We get undressed, uncivilize ourselves,
and while the television programming

and sicknesses of animals do not cease,
we reach such a pitch we’re purely body,

beyond its umpteen miseries,
enduring uproar in our skins so keen

it cannot be rendered, what we *a capella* say
all vowel and glottal stop. Is that your face

and these I grasp your only feet?
This dizzy, how can I wear a tie,

looking serious in shoes to feed a parking meter?
How is it we’re citizens, some day die,

and ape that ache and release here, eyes jittering
blunt and slit? Geometry claims an infinity

of instances, or nearly, cook up a surface.
Example: yours, bewildering my nerve ends,

putting the nuance into nuisance,
apple to apocalypse, in this brief kingdom

where God and the devil call truce, lie down
like dogs who fight each other but are exhausted.

OUT OF BODY

After the usual traffic
of ground, then guy-wires,
power-lines
and skillet-fried clouds
was me, looking distant
as suspended Houdini
baffling crowds,
visible only by the trajectory
of necks craned *en masse*
How small I was
and wrong
like the letter
in one word
misspelled

SEEING FAR

Watch the scrambled
pornographic channel
enough, which mouth
doing what where's
zigzagged like an
electrical disturbance's
interference's (black-and-
white cows instantly
slaughterhouse skeletal
on Polaroided, sheet-ice
fields) interrupted the signal
so that nipples are radar
blips, and pelvises,
fingers, lips blur quicker,
flicker, grow abstract
expressionist, oil
nudes in emergency
sprinkler downpour
of paint thinner. Don't sleep
all night, watching what's
what in tornadoing pixels,
longing for each smeary
zoom-in to stick, fix,
make its meaning clear
in hiss and insistences, *Yes's*,
etc.'s. Suddenly a face,
two faces, three,
a palm-lined patio

with drinks. One's
the producer. One's
the director. The third,
they'll make her a star.

QUESTIONING

Maybe now interrogate the atom, its ellipses,
ovals of whatnot and etc.

Ask the paper-
covered globe,
place names now antique
but still stretched spherical.

Birds know nothing
but return.

What bright light
and heavy phonebook,
car battery and minuscule clamps
to make that fucker talk?

LAREDO ORDEAL

for Matt Schumacher

X-rays of Texas reveal plenty
of sausage frying, to assuage
all hunger, breakfasts
tremulous in hands.

Say I wrote a book in which each word
and letter erased itself, but backwards,
Omega to Alpha, Hebrew, tower

disassembling fast, as now oval of flashlight
light sheds on attic pine boards,
sings along shingle nails' sharp ends.
We will know them by these signs,

bats who perambulate, stab
blindly, sending signals.

PARKING

For J.G.

Or sunlight unfastening from branches, I mean it
when I say my curse about the hospital of tender

longing, footprints on rain-wet asphalt
vanishing ellipses. What pulsing ruby crises,

constant in persistent blood, and detritus:
food wrappers, cigarette foil shivering,

wind emptying all of Wyoming, so we gasp
for errors in Accounting, listener. Listen.

GRILL

for Joel Brouwer

Nerves misjudge, are not to be trusted.
Hands grab plate glass.

And pupils, those tiny puppets,
far-fetched and amateurish,

let the brain convince them evening
grows exquisiter, especially

past wrecking yards, in grilled
windows, narcotizing, lush,

stiff and pricey drink
each drink of leaves fewer stabs

at recompense. Night, strict,
extinguishes detail until,

ink-spill-on-a-blotterly,
crushed and intact autos,

the press of them, mesh,
get mixed, like I meant about the senses.

SIMPLE

The gunman hovers on closed-circuit camera,
x-number of ones and zeroes,
face flushed pinker, if this were color.

Signs boast bargains in liquor.
He says something quickly, the visible
part of his mouth growing smaller and bigger.

The weapon's spectral, glints
where he holds it far from him
like a rare and dangerous mineral.

The time and date blink.
Behind the clerk,
little, illegible bottles burst.

FLIGHT

Swallowed condoms plump with cocaine rupture,
split like too-ripe fruit and spill their cargo,
washing ferrying passengers' stomachs,

followed down with little whiskey bottles,
lit by windowed sunset, emptied into
splashing plastic tumblers. Shades drawn, each eye's

iris widens. Nerve ends hallelujah
over checker-boarded fields. People
go to sleep or listen to their neighbors
sigh. Some others, accidentally sickened,

die before the EMTs arrive, or,
no, before the planes descend to asphalt,
slow, and rest at last like sleepers breathing
quietly, quietly, quietly, hushed.

BURGLARS

Cameras small as aspirin capsules,
smaller, each lens a grain of medicine,
injected, ride illuminated veins,

slam-bang along then through those passages'
walls, orbiting rockets abruptly un-
hinged, photographing what-all a body

hides, as now a stubbed-toed burglar whispers
curses, hissing, though nobody's home.
Her see-through negligee drapes a chair. He's
tried it on, over his work clothes: wrong size.

Lied. I lied. No such cameras
whir through bloodstreams yet, and the burglar stripped
first, pale, scared, lingerie a perfect fit,
cried until his mirrored image blurred.

ANOTHER

The body *is* a template, but who can read the blurprints

[*sic*]

where we misspell *misspell* or use these footprints as
sextants

as you were saying so recently famously in shrieky

electrostatic facsimile transmission frequencies,
intermittence

disappearance broadcast on taxicab tickers, pixilated
messages

trafficked far from the suspect junkyard cordoned and
glittering,

detectives' faces on laminated badges below the actual,
illuminated under a full moon gaudier and nearer in
puddle water,
easier smithereens among the skeletal wrecks.

XYZ

The world is all that is on our case:
power line downed in clairvoyant water,
moonlight on the burglar's crow bar.

Zoo animals rouse under facsimile foliage.
The little planets of our own eyes widen,
watching.

Or Houdini exposing hokum,
splinter from the true crucifix
needling a wound.

Blood drops
brown on unwashed
emergency room floors

seem real enough.
Better to be clever
or kind is the question

no one asks the authors
of signatures everywhere,
evidence of hands under brains.

EACH DAY

for Steve Schroeder

When my soul escapes from my body, I chase it, looking
foolish
as a man running after his hat with no head on his torso,
or
a small boy at the carnival pursuing released balloons
when his arms
sheared off in the tilt-a-whirl's gears, blood festooning all
over.

A headline rises from its story, floats like skyline fractions
of something
above horizon, no matter the continent or people
afflicted.

Classifieds advertise all manner of bargains.
Wedding dress, unworn. Child's crib, never used.

But I catch my soul, in fingertips, each hand, like a leaf
shivering
down in wind, tip-toe on window ledge so many stories
up
birds dizzy. No helping any thread or grain of wood.
Sorry, friends. It flutters. Shining. Symbolic.

APPETITE

for Greg Kosmicki

Resurrected, resuscitated zombie Elvis Presley
karate-chops through Graceland's solid-core doors,

insane for car keys, then brains, then sandwiches,
but cannot drive fast enough to bask in each gleam

of vanishing sunlight, purple and black and pink
as lingerie each number of miles, so unbolts the Lisa
Marie,

anchored in asphalt, hot-wires, siphons jet fuel,
and flies, humming the early tunes, acoustic,

from the 1968 comeback special, thinned down
and joking with all the back-up singers,

The Blossoms this time,
not The Jordanaires.