

BREATHS' BURIALS

Poems by Gustaf Sobin



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A NEW DIRECTIONS BOOK

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acknowledgments

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ON THE FRAGILITY OF IDOLS
AS IF WRITTEN IN A BOOK OF GLASS

for Sarah & Charlie

. . . as if written
in a
book of glass, read

of so
many sunken
numbers, eyes

fluttering like
fish at
the

base of
the
world. there, what-

ever issued, only
re-
entered, in-

extricable as
wind, but
viscous,

ballasted, the
heart as
if walking on its

head. was there a
way, asked
the word of the

word? memory
flooded, and lust
too

sudden, counted corals,
rep-
licated beads, while the

breath, hesitant,
hung be-
tween syllables.

ODE ON THE ELABORATION OF INTERVAL

. . . the same wave
that
fed, once, on its own
unraveling, all mica now, and
schist. ground heart, the

dark organs
of

image. had gradually
emerged, come
crawling
from under, gathering—in my
crossed arms—my very
own

shoulders. planks and
clapboard, our
quick

identifications, each thing
so
indissociably it-
self, self-
imbued.

even air, the air e-
bullient, the
ac-

cessibility, now, of
all matter, those
massive
ap-

propriations. (worked only
for the
disparate, that part—the dark slip
of muscle, the fanned shadow
of lashes—which had
no

equivalence. which held, held
us, just

out of
reach).

was, it
would seem, like a running curtain,
nearly a
world. (there were, we knew, no
others).

out, onto the
windy stage of
our landscapes, would wheel clouds,
trundle

en-
tire cartloads of
replica gods, too, in *trompe l'oeil*, the
whole
spectacle of the

pre-
empted. nothing's
too far, it
would seem, if—in flaking—it

re-
flect. if, spoken,
re-

sound.

whereby 'would,'
'might,' the lost
panoply
of the conditional. yes, that even
here, within the
lens

of my own
breath, 'you' —of
all
words, the very
first—might, at last, issue. be

blown

over the
bright pages. brought
to that luster, those shadows, these
rocks that glisten
in the very
lee
of their own saying. to where, that
is, sub-

stance it-
self

might substantiate.

(no, it's
not me, now,
who's being illusive, but the overwhelming
im-
mediacy of each
vacated instant. the surfeit

of so
much
scuttled letter).

be sign and
its ef-

fluence, the draft of your
scarf, as—al-

ready—it
enters interval. there, just
over the
ocean's
grey echo, gather buttercup
and rue, bindweed and gentian. give to
each—each instance—its

own
measure. for breath

against breath, it's
through the words we'd
accede: phrase

you
initiate, and I—in diastole—pursue.

FOURTEEN IRISES FOR J.L.

there, blossoming once again, like blown
goblets, the irises in their annual
ovulations. yes, emptiness, at
last, enveloped, inscribed. is there anything, indeed, but
emptiness? but emptiness, at last, en-
veloped? inscribed?

. . . one color
follows upon another like
polyphonic voices: last week, violet, and
this, a rubbed mahogany, freckled rose, recalling
worlds—voices—you've never known.

. . . like so
many stubby paintbrushes, they
burst—turbaned—into splashed
panels, running murals (a breath as
if perishing in the
very exercise of its scales).

no, it's not the irises that
return, each spring, but
ourselves. ourselves—cyclical—who've entered the
sign, and stoop, now, before
them: tenuous altars to our own
tenuous passage.

all irises, finally,
kaleido-
scopic; with each
in-
finitesimal turn, a
fresh

conceit. god-
blossom, lightning-

root, verb on which,
germinal, the
air it-

self's as if

ir-
idized.

like those glazed, involuted tissues on their tall, unwavering stems, we, too, as if perch, alighting—as we have—amongst phonemes, polyphones: what tell us, each instant, to our fingertips.

came late. even later, now, *la langue d'oc* having all but vanished, remained the irises, the troubadours' lightning roses, blue as thunder in the dark thunder's *dissoulucioun*.

where dew slips,
icy
pearl, from its

petal, the
tall stalk

scarce-
ly trembles. . . .

irises, really, are nothing more than the frozen frames of an otherwise invisible drift, our relentless elision past. what they—heraldic, voluptuous—would arrest.

how each of these blossoms—these volutes—lapping ogival, inscribe a void. oh ours, that hollow, that heart, that inherent omission: doom blooming from the rhizomes up.

drafted, the petals get blown, now, across paper. their deep scrolls, rolled tabernacles, little more than scribbled deposits. chimeric hoards.

(*gothic*)

death, and these,

~~our ever~~

more
ephemeral re-

sponses, their
fluttering
chalices (faience
the

skull dreamt. . .).

. . . way that the irises drift, now, be-
neath yours. current in which—wind-
barges—they'd enter, perhaps, your
very dreams. there, before dissolving (so much
grammatical particle) might billow. writhe vibrant.

a white chair, its legs caught
in tall stalks
of white iris, was what, finally,
remained. monologue in which, abandoned
to those immensities, each
of us murmur.

PSALMODIC

knelt there, in that
knuckle of
rock. nothing's
less than the word, brittle
as

crumbs, not
even the wind, what's
rising—gentian—just now,
be-

fore you.

TRANSPARENT ITINERARIES: 1991

were no origins (so we were told), only ends.

nowhere, really, to reach except those occasional places in which, sometimes, we'd orchestrate those
ends. set their emptiness—in measured bars, volutes, ellipses—to sound.

those hill villages, for instance, each autumn, weeks after they'd been abandoned,

still, after so much depredation, an ocherous rose.

language, making metaphor as it does out of a fundamen- tally metaphoric existence, has—at least—the power of its double negations.

'you,' it would seem, more *place*, at first, than *person*, (there, for example, where the shadows—in foaming—as if seethed).

existing, as we did, in so much myriad reflection.

—flamboyant shell—

nearer, certainly, you would have
vanished; further, we'd
never have known
that—for hours at a time—we'd
had the same name.

otherwise, endless as the air itself. as wind, the consis- tency of soot.

only the glint, you said, wasn't incidental. only the glint, occasionally, glowed (or seemed to).

'seemed to,' I repeat, observing—thus—that spent usage.

—you, who'd always been just an instant earlier—

within your gaze, would
turn; in your long fingers,
root.

composed, as we are, of creases. of creases and append- ages. or so, at least, we'd assumed.

oh, how many hallucinated cells within a single, predeter- mined body.

. . . the mirage of how many rocks . . .

where a distance—once—preserved us.

kept us primed—as if essential—within its invisible quiver.

(what, awakened, the organs first rose toward).

its icons invested with breath: *our breath*. what held us—for so long—out of reach of our own dismantling.

flexed interval.

what, with each new appropriation, had only receded. had nearly vanished, now, into an 'already-after- worn tokens; gutted sums.

'seeking to conquer a larger liberty, man,' according to Melville, had but extended 'the empire of necessity.'

... in which, not even gagged, a gratuity of sounds ...

would wrestle in
~~these shadows for that~~
light, that
luster, for those
blown drops driven—incandescent—past so
much extinguished
mirror.

as if cupped, irrecuperable.

an alcove in air!

where, otherwise, had gone on vanishing in the very midst of so much acquisition: at the very heart of
its heavily compressed metals.

*mother of no one, as
woman you
enter, occupy nothing, but stand, water-
slick in the midst of these pitted
whispers, no one's, once
again.*

ANGUISH & METAPHOR

only in air
do the knots dissolve, only
without, with-
in, in the echoing

organs, dis-
perse. earth in-

verted, a life as if passed
a-
mongst its
attributes, you'd rise,
rise as

I'd plummet, your hair—in-
volved—harden, just
there, where

I'd
vanish.

TRACING A THIRST

for E.F.

called it: tracing a
thirst, the poem
as it

sluices a
passage; with each,
dry

utterance, edges
towards its
own

ob-
fuscated source. no,
not the

world, the
world's, but,
per-

haps, its
very
postulate. what the

winds
would lap, and the
tongue,

ultimately,
muscle: breath, like
so

many
empty bubbles, brought
to

that pleated lip.

THE VILLAS OF ANDREA PALLADIO

there, once again, at the
world's
very edge, you're
pointing out palaces, aren't
you? tapping

at that viscous
glass, holding them, the

im-

memorable, at the
tip

of your lacquered
nail. there, just there, where the
barge pivots, seems to
station in the
midst

of its own vapors. 'see
it?' you

ask. I see
your lacquered nail, its
wavering
reflection, follow it

across
those stalled waters. *pier, pilaster,*
fronton, the pure scale

of so much
hal-

lucinary mass. (not even a
hedgerow to break
the

effect, not even
a stray dog, the ragged line of
its
leash).

null, in so
many
numbers, isn't this
what you mean? this, that's
meant? blown
mirrors, the void in

which, turgid, our
viscera

would glow? among the
room,
rooms, the

words empty—spacious—enough to

withhold us? isn't
this, that's
nothing, what the
cells—wedging—would jam?

billows about you, a
scarf of
clouds, pigeons. yes, a sudden
air
of apparent be-

wilderment. tell, tell
me to my-

self, before even
you
get swept
into that wash of sounds, the lagoon,
al-

ready, in a
sputter
of tugs, marked by so

many rigorously
a-
ligned pilings. yes, before
our own breath hardens
a-

bout its very
words, and our bodies, once again,
beat

against the
muslin of their veiled reflections.

ON THE NATURE OF THE ICONIC

what bursts in the very moment of bursting is image.

its bunched chimera.

even though, immediately after, she'd as if begun gathering together her every gesture; as if collecting
—once again—the scattered, grey blades of her gaze.

accumulating—as you'd put it—diaphanous.

just there, where the curtains ripple, each time, through the draft of their own deafness.

neither this side, nor that.

(of what, indeed, knew no end, no depth, no dimensions whatsoever, but—being verbless—existed in
an underworld entirely its own).

a well of shadows—you might have written—surrounded by a garland of splashing leaves.

by the gloss of so much apparent matter.

while she—steadily—as if thinned into focus.

(fixed rays of her earrings; what she'd just fastened, sapphire).

muscled, luminous.

as if such signs (in an uninterrupted emission of signs) might only have erupted out of the
disarticulated. its depths.

cast in so much counterpart.

she, as if reconstituting that white memory to which you'd otherwise have had no access.

miming its exact outlines, its deepest cleavages.

toying, thus, with those immemorial losses, thoroughly unaware, in so doing, of the magnitude of such
provocation.

the tips of her fingers, that very instant, running nimble over her glowing cheeks; adjusting here,
there, the slightest wires of that all-too-perfect dissemblance.

like notes, struck vibrant, off some dismantled instrument.

yes, just then, as her each feature converged, grew limpid,

the circumstantial, absolute.

oh, all the meanings, values, irrefutable definitions we'd given ourselves.

the alphabets. the blown letters of how many driven alphabets.

(within which, notwithstanding, had adored).

as she stood there, now, her name changing with the light, the shadows, the time of day: pure replicas
of the otherwise obliterated,

as if the door alone might be altar. our very last.

and the moment itself, sacrificial.

IDIOM

no work, now,
for the living, had risen on so
many scuttled
images. euphoria, a
form

of despair, spoke
only

to the mouth, shoving

'clouds'

between its teeth, slipping 'mineral.'

"still there?"

would

ask, as if the lips, alone,

might sprout, break florescent

into their

own

abolished

idiom.

NACRE

dawn, and the ground as

if slipping

from under-

neath the brittle sheath of its stars:

all those

in-

nate in-

stabilities. what the 'given,' each

time, took. told us (just as you'd

tell your-

self) that the body's

bundled, the nerves knotted

about something far too slight, e-

vanescent, to

utter. lay it, then, in the

interstice: *between* the

be-

tween, oh all

that e-

laborate scroll, the white

letter of

protracted allusion: the

name alone of the figure you'd glow in,

nacreous, now, in the

flagellated rays of

its nimbus.

THE DEATH OF FLASH-BACK

no, not even those
wind-
pitted belfries, their quarried rectangles scooped
into so
many minuscule
alveoli, no, not even they, now,
would receive
notice. faster, the

instant as
if ob-

literates its own
passage, feeds
us

on its fresh
vacuities. arms, shoulders, teeth: *these*, after
all, were our
last

possessions. were what
we'd

wager
against that
very sleekness. for enveloped, the
breath, occasionally, still went under. took us

into the
heavy folds of
its mirrors: there, where
beds, carpets, armchairs stood, like

salvage itself,
within its rippling pleats. wedged, would

lie there, our gazes
blown, while our lives, as
if

voided, flew
over.

LINES FROM PIETRO LONGHI

". . . and the floor by the girl, rendered darker."

P.L., 13 May 1749

for Beatrice & Beatrice

. . . here, sheets
of music
have as if
 fluttered onto the
vermillion
table, where the
three
musicians, squinting,
inter-
pret whatever bars
that they
can.

... in the midst
of so much
black
crinoline, she's
curtsying
be-
fore the
beige lady, the
tip
of whose fan
poses circumspect
a-
gainst an
intransigent chin.

. . . here, only
empty
gesture, infatuated
deed. with the
brief
sweep of
a hand, he's
showing her

towards the tall,
~~chocolate-~~
brown volumes, his
eyes, all the
while, fixed
upon the
deep
heave of her bosom.

. . . with fans
like black
scallops
half-
covering their
face, they
traffic in
whispers (the
thin
lascivious hiss
of so
much strict
con-
fidenze).

. . . appears twice in
the same
painting (she, even
creamier in the
oval
portrait that
Longhi, just to the
left, executes,
his
brush, that
very
instant, lingering
a-
gainst the gold fold
of her
lid).

staring into a
future that they'd
never see, these
svelte
extortionists, masked

as-
trotologi.

she's reading her
own
wretched fortune
into the
palm
of the plump
bellezza, who's
gazing—for
her
part—into the
deep
reaches of some
pale
arborescent decor.

. . . the tiny dogs
in the paintings of
Pietro
Longhi are
no less ornamental
than his
sitters. most
wear
ribbons, usually
cerulean, sometimes
cold
rose.

. . . against a
floor, lacquered
black, the
scattered
flotilla of their
narrow,
ivory-
white slippers,
each set, it would
seem, at
some critical, pre-
determined
angle.

behind the

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