

Abstract

Title of Document	AVENUE
	Tim DeMay Masters of Fine Arts, 2014
Directed by	Elizabeth Arnold Department of English

The following poems stem from an extended meditation on what it might mean to limit the agency and activity of the self. Throughout “Avenue,” the self builds less than it is built, even when in the position of a creator. Alongside and imbricated with the content is a high level of interest in the formal capabilities of extended, complicated, and broken syntax. Form and content broadly change with the three sections of the thesis: Part One seeks to explore the possibilities of the personal lyric poem, Part Two maps the thesis’ concerns onto a historical figure and a series of poems following a strict form, and Part Three attempts to broaden the personal concerns into social or historical levels through the figure of the city and that of the avenue.

AVENUE

by

Tim DeMay

Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of the
University of Maryland, College Park in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Arts
2014

Advisory Committee:

Professor Elizabeth Arnold, Chair
Professor Joshua Weiner
Professor Michael Collier
Professor Stanley Plumly

© Copyright by

Tim DeMay

2014

*Table of Contents**Part One*

On A Clear Day, Agnes Martin, 1973	2
Abstract	3
The New Vitality	4
Abstract	5
Abstract	6
Abstract	7
Trauerspiel	8
The New Virality	10
Abstract	11
The Phenomenology of Perception	12
The Weather of the Poem	15
Abstract	16
Abstract	17
Medium	18
Abstract	20

Part Two

[The Early History of Pietro Angelero]	22
--	----

Part Three

City of Heavens	37
City of Refuse	38
City of Heizer	39
City of Airports	41
Avenue	42
City of Beneath	52
City of Storms	54

PART ONE

On A Clear Day, Agnes Martin, 1973

At the north end of the metro station
the roof stops and the floor continues for

another forty feet marking a line
where shadow ends and gives way to sun like

coming out of the mountains to prairie —
canvas pulled so tightly the pencil's graph-

ite stumbles in wheat stalks and at the wind's
invisible heft bumps against the text-

ure in a wriggling failure to contain
all it apprehends in the shape of lo-

gic — always more in the moment of it
breaking out like the sun over the roof

lighting the brick pattern of the walkway
that seems to lift itself, its perfect grid

hovering now — and I am caught in it
as it extends past the train tracks that bord-

er it into the infinity of
a grid: everything becoming a

point, becoming surface, sent out — the view
is the narrow hall of a body's shape

that sees that it will not see the shadow
or what is behind, evinces its lack

while the grid burrows into crevice and
corner, flows into and out of the on-

coming train pointed south toward Virginia
and farther, piercing the Atlantic and

Brazil, the poles, and more, going on to
all we will never know, discover, see —

Abstract

The emptiness it is — beginning
 blessed in the assonance of phrase
like a dream of what is coming, surreal and devoid,
at first, of sense,
 but later as apt as rain

— is all the more
 the excavated pit of a place
long dusted over by history and the improbable
 sandstorm that I,

ancient unknown even to myself until the pen chose the word
 out of the jet-stream moving
us along,

have recognized, by my dry eyes,
by the humidity
 and the chapped skin,

as the strong winds of the past recomposed
 to chip away
at the fragments of the future's
unfinished sentence —

The New Vitality

I watched the sunset and tried to hear
the hills sigh the horizon of tomorrow's
most pressing possibilities — a few
meandering colors, a wisp of cloud

like a blade of straw — but this was
the old vitality. You can come along,
dear blurred rainbow of ancient
promises, drafts of letters ripped up and

scattered wide — they are still
somewhere, right? And maybe that
is enough, to scour the flowers for
pieces and tape them together

in a museum or as replicas in our
breezeways. Anyone worth his couple
thousand gallons of bone pressed
by the world's plates into this

stuff running through the organs
of an automobile knows enough to
look elsewhere: how quickly we
skipped beyond that sky once our

space was full of tiny, invisible ways to
exchange a city for a graveyard —
nervous marketplace of sticky
stocks and bindings — now stuck finger-

tapping at the carwash and its intestines
woven networked and chugging:
this iron lung is the new vitality of a
long drive home, evening-bound.

Abstract

I can yet see it through the snow —
friend, the letter you wrote to your parents

and the fierce weather of its words, outer figure
of unknown life against blank sky,

what I was given to read, the unspeakable
in the air — it was there, it was

— through the abstracted moment
of a cloud now melting into the brick sidewalk to leave the trace

of a single flake's presence: there is only the movement
ordering the moments —

is there only ever movement ordering
the wild unknowable world,

its torrent of text no one
remembers

save by their ghosts: unseen,
unheard,

the
shadow of no object in the dark

Abstract

(As if trying
to forget enough might

move into the lamplight
with the ease and

panache of a foreign hand's
machinations

attached to the
familiar body

Abstract

One occasionally hopes to take account
of oneself without the need of a single
bird — but the flurry

of these fragments
and examples of unspecific time sweeping
up unavoidably like the amorphous

creeping of precipitation-maps
is so many
poised swallows anxiously twittering

and ready to unveil in wing and rustle
not the heavy bell tolling behind the hood
of whatever hooded thing

but the uneasy Almost
which overflows to flood
to threaten to flood

in the precise added moment

that river risen behind us —
now, these waters are unfigured even by flight
or the well-tended border between the banks:

these lines and lines of one
of who one is
or what —

Trauerspiel

Sorrow shows up late.
Somewhere in the third act after
the rising action has risen
and the masks begin to sag
and the pen begins eying
the end, Sorrow clatters
into the door and sashays
like a drunk moth through
the enfurnished scene.
He throws himself
across a sofa splayed like a
dying philosopher,
attentive students hanging
on Sorrow's every studied
word. Sometimes there is a crow
and sometimes we mistake it
for a raven. Sometimes
Sorrow sings and sometimes
cries. Everyone, by the end,
dies. But Sorrow stays to clean
or just to linger. Slow
and so unsteadily Sorrow
fits the oddly shaped serving
dish between the blender
and the Thanksgiving
decorations where bulky
things go. No dry eye
in the amphitheater because
the amphitheater is in
ruins, taken apart by history
and Sorrow. This would be
the hillside of a thousand
graves had our neighbors
not moved the bodies
to the lowlands where the soil
is soft enough to range
the tombstones in ordered,
planned rows composing
the future as a pixelated portrait
of Sorrow's left hand
turning slowly in the sun

to hail a taxi heading
anywhere else, like raisins
in a loaf of baking bread
moving out away from each
other along all the graph's
axes which run like straight
streams through hidden
woods until they meet at
nothing, in this opening,
a lacuna of field
where grows thorny Sorrow
among the heather.

The New Virality

Airports closed across Europe
as ash swayed like shredded
curtains and in a Chicago café
I watched planes of light unsettle

the atmosphere into dust. The air was
bad, some unpronounceable
shoot emptying the Earth's bowels
to scatter over its face from Scandinavia

as if trying to forget us and our
words for what is above. Come dinnertime
and I would sell without much swaying
the clouds for spread thighs

and a craning neck, whatever
skips this cratered, rocky distance
as if by this point you are
living from orgasm to orgasm

and maybe you are, the new
virility of an existence blowing apart
like paper. Each lost moment in the
immorality of a switched

pronoun is the replication
of self through time: you knock
on the table to register the table and
yourself along the knuckle; they were real

then. You are yourself going
viral through this alien world.
When its eyes lower enter in:
drink the canyoned coffee slowly.

Abstract

Tilling the reverse subtraction
to move the land from itself in rows

the linguist wiped his brow
with a hand warm with sweat

and bent to take again the shovel and the plow
digging deeper and deeper

until he buried them.

The Phenomenology of Perception
—for R.

Thus are delimited in the totality of my body regions of silence. — Merleau-Ponty

On the other side where I
staring

into some unthinking nothing
heard a voice

like a whole world
remind my mindlessness of the there

I was within
in its saying

not to me nor anyone
there

but into the phone at her ear
I do not know anymore

what to do
the words next to those

from the book in my lap mixing together
in the nonspace of reading

*In understanding others the problem
is always indeterminate*

what was hers
I wondered looking through the window

looking at the window
at her face in profile reflected in

the window
through which the words

seemed to bloat and thicken
into trees and cars

people walking by
the phantom limb of grief

reached out like
the case study in my book

an amputee forgets he lost
his arm until the mundane moments

a closed jar or door
register the absence and the world

changes only when habit itself
feels the change and counts it

before mind does
makes the mind after itself

like a word might
or rather a name replacing the one

who is gone
in the holy collision

of the memory and the missing
of the tree and your motorcycle

I say it when you are not here
and you are

something like you
harrowing through sound

and digging a well in the present
where I cup the liquid

of clear memory
where I cup nothing at all

for no hand is there
only absence stretching through language into

absence like her
fishing in the air for the right word

to wrestle it into sound
I didn't mean to hear her but did and then did

mean it *To feel emotion*
is to be involved in a situation

which one is not managing to face and from which
nevertheless one does not want to

escape when she hung up
a world closed behind her

something remained
some silence full of names

she sat straight and stared
out the window

and I was almost shaking
though I did not know why

the body knows
another knowing knows

I wanted to say
are you alright

or be still
I wanted to say

what was the name
the one I thought I heard

gone so many years ago
I looked across the space

to the other side and
saw

The Weather of the Poem

Left on my bed where gather the pressure systems of sleeping worlds that, unpatterned by human footprint or speech, cover us like quilts, the poem has stirred the room's embranglements to draft and rise above the furniture amassed in huddled watch — ruins of dreamy fables in which we discovered each other stretched along a futon or bent in pain or exhaustion over the low-lit desk — to mark with their design what is no longer here by a drawer open and emptied like a mouth, as if to swallow a part of the sky coalescing in miniature, this storm building over the bed in columns of blooming clouds to fill the impossible room where only the many-eyed walls can applaud the drama uncoiling between the unspoken stillness of a caesura and the unwritten ceiling, where only the ears folded into the bookcase will listen for the machines of thunder.

Abstract

Too large for these
narrow beams of light

through dusty air

Abstract

The relief of an oak on a fall evening
 orange leaves like warm light through shutters
 lit from the deepness of itself

is an angel of fire —
 the mind or the memory in the faceless eyes
 seeing the hole

of the thing and emptiness eternal of a
 tree
 knows

to extend the leaves and shake them off before
 a winter of naked angels

rings about like the peal of bells
 like the wind through the ages

hammering the place
 swinging the air to banner the pastness that always looks behind
 the windy moment of this tree

praying skyward to the god
 of trees — they which steady, they which arbor, they
 which count —

and History
 an acorn closed beneath its shell
 capped tightly and drawn beneath the contours of its shell

is not here to who may unscrew it
 to look into the seed of some other thing
 glowing dully.

Medium

—for J.

Through the half-light of our history,
 I have started to scavenge for branches
 bent with purpose and the soft indentations of feet

to tip me toward that of you I never
 knew, never saw even the first collected fragments
 of: like scattered glass in which

we read the accident and the object
 whose transparency I have too easily mistaken.
 That is how I apologize for my unknowing.

What I thought was simply the wood floor
 cut me open. You can see through
 a thing like how a voice works by bringing

you along in the music of its light
 chains of reference, its egging-on to guess
 that a payoff waits at the final, end-stopped

line; and you can see the thing itself,
 like how a voice feels, how its physics
 curves the air to buffet the body, waves overfull

and sense spreading out like heat, like wind, like rays,
 like weather building the real
 of the world through the invisible

idea of the idea. Younger brother, when I was told
 you had begun to speak aloud to no one
 in the house for the house was empty,

that alone in the nothing air you would read
 the outlines of others, knowing the legibility
 of utter lack, I wanted to tell you that

though ghost the receiver your voice
 still built a world, though message became sound
 it was still a carrier: this is no horror,

however much my skin stretches to avoid
the feel of a foreign truth pressed against it,
but rather the census of everyone

and the absence they own — this is no real
apology either, this poem. It is another voice with no
body in your young life: I am sorry.

You are many people. I am looking for you.

Abstract

Repeating the shape of letters
 the
 tip of an invisible pencil over
 the phrase written at the top of the page

 and left like the marker of a trail
 now overgrown

 and forgotten
 tracks along the curve of a lowercase “o”
 its prey that hides just below the surface of the paper

 or not there at all
 foxes forward into the eternity of a single
 furrow: *to be the only moving thing*

 I wrote as another
 as one brimming with right and proper intention
 for a house much different than

 this thin-walled model
 where in the wind breezes from the outside

 and the only containment
 is a future of open doors and rooms sprawling
 into the woods —

 I close the notebook and its blank pages overwhelm
 the lone phrase like a symbol

 for the possibility of making a symbol

 like a glove in a field
 and the cold hands of some maker
 somewhere

PART TWO

The following is an account of the man who became Pope Celestine V. Born at the beginning of the 13th Century, Pietro Angelerio served as a Benedictine monk and lived in a cave in the mountains of Sicily for 60 years before being elected pope against his will. He served as pope for five months before abdicating the papacy, which Dante later described in The Inferno as “the great refusal”.

I.

Who are we anyway? A question in a cloud, low cloud come down and fill mountainside cave, vagrant friend, childhood pal, old chum who never knocks but never takes anything either, just sits and wags his airy tongue until you are shivering in the midst of it and even morning prayers can't pierce the haze. Monk listens to the cloud call his name. Only hears the quiet elision of self. Pietro the monk is lost, though he knows where he is. He has spent decades as the great refusal to become his. When he sits desire flames up in front and he stares its waver into ash. Shorn clean at the fine end of a long life's razor, Pietro counts the myriad fires he cannot quite put out and names them we, for someone is legion. We open our mouths and when we speak a smoke whispers out to curl signs in the cave. Or the flames are memories — the old sheepdog his parents gave him, the kind slope of farm, the day his sheepdog died *like all things*, so his father had said, and we are them as well, for you bring us with you, wherever you go, you can't help it, we are here, we come along, we ride like burs on the hem, fill eyes, fill ears, fill the whole great body of the world, whatever we might be — burned Pietro gaped: *So many are the fires that ember me!*

II.

One day Pietro became the cliffside, and he hung himself
from the sunbaked edge until he was a warm and glowing shelf.
Birds forgot him. For hours the sun stepped all over his back.
The mountain didn't move all that much, even when it unpacked
its brigades into the space between hawk-screech and its low prey,
where we were, maybe where we already live — though who can say?
A voice comes together from the scrub and rock and high cool air.
We speak it, and it vibrates through our cloaks, dirty and threadbare,
worn loosely around the denial to be more than a leaf.
Pietro shakes with the season and hangs from a branch. Our grief
threatens above us, and then it happens, at once, like lightning,
flashing down, talons outstretched, on terrible wings fast-riding
until the whole poor mess of us is scattered apart like dust —
but one is caught and made, through grip and capture, through pain, one must
bear it all; the moment names him. Pietro sits and wonders
if Adam only knew an animal's name when in thunder
he saw the split sky coming and the breath that will breathe no more.
Better to practice unbecoming, these things that are not born
and never die, just pass from thing to thing, God's private mirage.
Pietro hides. He covers up the seams of his camouflage.

III.

Felt it first in the air unsettled as if a distant hand
 had reached down from the sky and stirred up the world. Pietro scanned
 the horizon, set his sight atop tall trees for perspective
 and raked the country with falcon eyes after mice gone hectic
 and scurrying: saw high the far dust kicked up by a hermit,
 neighbor to Pietro by two days journey, holy, learned —
 a visitor! The cave had the must of being long uncleaned,
 and he rushed to hide a snakeskin, scrubbed his cloak until it gleamed,
 ran his deer-bone comb through what frayed tangle he hoped was his beard,
 tried to make himself presentable. Even bathed. He felt sheared —
 sheepish and awkward. By dusk he heard heavy breathing outside
 the doorway and saw the face of the breather: Goffredo sighed
 until his mouth found a greeting. The words fattened and cramped poor
 Pietro's great refusal to own what he could not afford:
 words the most costly. Goffredo was a tree of tiny birds
 and when one stopped chirping another began until the sound blurred —
 he wanted to stand and clap, at once, fly them scattered! *I fast
 and I pray; is this all there is to a life?* Goffredo asked.
 Pietro grew dark, stared him to silence as night came,
 then raised his hands — on fire! — *If you will, you may become all flame!*

IV.

Pietro awoke missing a tooth — just one, but it was gone,
leaving a gap he could breathe through like the sun picking the dawn.
Still, though he hadn't thought too much about it, he missed it now.
All the normal places were searched: the pillow a boy from town
had given him, his brush fashioned from the jawbone of a deer,
the small hole mice sometimes trafficked. He grew confused, put his ear
against the ground, and listened. No one spoke — but then the mountain
began to beat a far-off drum that shook him and he counted
the artery's pressure and rhythms: ninety over forty.
A body set down its foot and turned slowly. There was glory
in the ridge, glory in the crags, and the peak that was an eye
bent over the town. We are the stretch against the rule to bind
sky in skin. It streams out of us. Pietro moved and the world
moved with him. Moved as him. Moved him. Vast wings lifted and unfurled.
It was then Pietro saw footprints leading outside his cave,
and he followed them like the coast after a receding wave,
coming to a home in the woods — saw his tooth in the palm
of a boy who had stolen it as a relic. Evening calm
spread as he watched from outside, candled thoughts flickering ruthless.
That night, ringed by white relics, a monk slept soundly, and toothless.

V.

When the snow thawed he followed a muddy runnel of runoff down the mountain in its elemental pilgrimage, its soft padded holy procession, to the lowest point, wherever that may be – is this a parable held off for one clever enough to pierce the pieces? Bodies compelled like waterfalls to pool in purposeful places? Nature whispering its call to kneel? No, it doesn't line up. What meaning is here is half. Is the fragment of a shattered thing not once seen whole. He laughs. We are the audience of reeds trembling at his windy jokes. Pietro is the punchline he doesn't quite get, but he knows everyone will one day keel at the comedy. The thin stream is aimed toward town; the rooftops prick the sky to open the dream he never fully wakes from: in a candlelit, dusty room he sits before a book as blank and deep and vast as a full moon peering over the ivory land. Each page takes two hands to turn. When he opens it the world becomes translated and he learns the ancient power of words to raise their agile hands and make the fox and ferret, the desert and the daffodil. He takes a page and folds it, puts it in his cloak. Each morning he reads the words of everything to plant the world's meaning seed by seed.

VI.

It was a virtue and so the sale of self began at the first blush of sky ashamed to mark hours that Pietro would soon rush out of. *If to die is gain*, well, he thought, *it is worth a try, then to wear it habit-like and airy*. He could spend his life like a rich man, emptying his pockets until all he owned was air. The wallet of his lungs grew fat with what he had loaned. Ready to begin ending, Pietro drew away his feet, praying the quick life out and making an orderly retreat like water wrung from a sponge, just colder. He had forgotten his legs by sunrise — half of a monk waited to be bought and sold to the stones. Becoming is so much easier when you do not stick around to see it finished: you can leave, refuse the most invisible desires, some great refusal to speak from a mouth and be either mouth or words, neither thing nor weak approximation of it. Is it too abstract? Oh he knows! But not for long: the beating history of Pietro flows like a river whose source approaches the sea with the river until there is no river at all — gone! The widening yawn of waves curl the sun; the air shimmers; the deep reflects the dawn.

VII.

There was a slump: someone had to be in it. *Might as well*, thought Pietro, *be me*. He spent himself to sadness and so bought the world another morning. A great effort — we all agreed. Things went awry: he stopped bathing, let his garden go to weeds, prayed only for escape from premonitions of upturned bowls, but you were the eternal blinking gaze beaming into souls and looking away: he withered in the brilliant light, too pure. When he stood, a shadow grew behind him, but he was not sure what was casting it anymore, or for whom, so he refused to turn around, walking wide circles instead. *I didn't used to be such a meek downer I think but one must at times come to terms with the weather and sun and the air's low distant hum.* That week there were bees everywhere. On his better days he taught them to sing a song from his childhood: Steam is in the teapot/
A spark is in the wood/The ocean is a single tear/Fresh from the Father's hood. *O*, he would say so the vowel would stretch his mouth and he could feel the form of absence, *O I have stayed long on my mountain too long I shall go to town I'll parade about alone we shall take up the swarming blood in whose veins we are quite becoming and the sun on those wide open lanes—*

VIII.

The morning devotion wrote him. He was reading John's Gospel
when came up the skin like jagged-limbed insects, like a hostile
army, the letters to checker Pietro until his flesh
became Word — divine joke we stopped laughing at when in the mesh
of text we lost sight of him. Idea am I — something else
too: am I speaking or am I writing? I am the self's shell
filled with what I am not. The verses turn and you are the break
that tells him where to start again. Uneasy Pietro aches
for a metaphor! No word only, no mirror for the air
gazing back at its empty endlessness, rather one aware
of its weight on the tongue, bread-language, thick-speech, symbol that slides
out of the mouth and pools below: a still lake as a disguise
for the future buzzing in the cattails. He sings the crickets
trembling in the warm air and feels the exact words to quicken
the scene into existence collect soundlessly on the span
of what once was his chest, now a stanza. Tomorrow will scan
what today composes, but neither will know how to read it.
Pietro is the great refusal to be quite literate:
each unread word of him wriggles to settle the coming age.
Prophet Pietro feels the braille on his skin and turns the page.

IX.

It was a kicked stone that leapt and ran an unexpected bell
sounding the brittle air metallic and alien. He fell
onto it, saw its inverse shadow flash sun-full and starry.
Pietro looked into its blank, stupid face and felt sorry
so many leaves had fallen before he had unearthed this man
stamped and raised in gold: St. John the Baptist to hold in the hand.
He knelt to dare to lift the coin someone had dropped, a florin,
dull yellow, inscribed mystic and glowing, sign of a foreign
language he knew not the grammars of. Pietro wanted it.
The sides etched a geography of exchange riven and split
by faith in the unseen answers to equations of desire:
hand the coin to another, feel its living power expire
in this literal metaphor — something is carried across,
above the thing like a bird tracing the same path you are lost
and wandering down. The moment he thumbed the coin he wanted
to give it away for something else — its queer beauty haunted
him and his secret savings for an impoverished future.
In front of the fullest tree he tried to purchase a root or
a limb. He held it to the air and asked for its windy psalms.
He tossed it in the begging river, knew again his empty palms.

X.

It is tending toward disarray and disaster and in the far-flung energies of a returning chaos we are our star's shameful, red-faced cousin, impossibly untidy, unclean! Pietro shivers paralytic against the moving stream of dirt circling a world in need of being shaken out like an old blanket hidden away for guests. He is the doubt of shiny futures scrubbed into annihilation. It just gets moved around. What you leave behind is your oeuvre of dust kept neatly piled under rugs or behind the unopened door. Pietro studies the straight and narrow way to sweep a floor. This without much holiness is the great refusal to count the sum of self by its litter, as if the violin's sound was measured by the sweat and grunts of a lesson's exhaustion. Then the mess untunes him. Pietro is aswarm and lost in discrete elements that vibrate and pulse like living objects, impossible to judge which belong. Democracy collects it all, and at the curved suggestion of grape stems in the trash he turns to sweep the planet into his cave, his squirreled stash of everything, for it is him or someone. He cleans and cleans until there is no room left for him to sleep. But the world gleams.

XI.

He knows what it sounds like, don't shake your head! Even monks may fall in love. Or rather: memory is a leopard whose hunched crawl bows its back taut behind the very leaves of the very tree in front of us — a form shakes the wind, a traitor eye insees the bent elbow we held long ago, with care, to keep her from falling. One is always about to lose the ground. The bright plum of the past rounds in his palm: it feels like youth if what is youth were a town we visited as someone else. Taste would be proof but Pietro fears the fruit exhumed from fact will disappear and erase the phantom girl with it, she whom, so many years ago, he had walked to the water with, before the promise and the hood, before the great refusal to be St. Thomas with his hands all over anothers'. They had spread a picnic of bread and fruit; she had hummed a hymn he didn't know. It sticks to his tongue still. And when she peered over the edge the wet rock slid — he caught her, but only delayed the eventual drop that he now is, for memory makes it, each time. He has not moved from the tree, but when he searches for the plum the past brought back, he sees only the water. The current writes a letter. Pietro cannot make it out. He bends to read it better.

XII.

What does it mean to be a wind? The thought had come upon him
from nowhere's quiet vector out of a cloud's impulsive whim.
He felt it or did he? Impossible to tell a light wind
from a shudder. Shake and silent. Then, stronger, wind wrote a hymn
of the leaves and open spaces. Song of the lost disgraces
it had whistled past, the rundown cities, the ruined places.
Winds of sadness along Pietro's arm and the wind it wept
or he did — something was a tear. Something had carefully stepped
with a foot disappearing into the air. He stretched his arm
and it blew through the room, spooling and snaking its wispy yarn
into corners and mouse holes. Wind he was, wind maybe always.
He was tree top, wing release, dust mover, sky exhale, sun ray.
Plane of the moment, every touch a mind ready to unwind
self body-stuck and heavy. Pietro's elongated spine
coiled the world, weathered up, knew us all. You were so lonely,
he remembers, and grey sky came, hair by sharp wind was blown, he
ran you up, were you still alone? Did you breathe him in, spirit
song, world-breath, O soul invisible, melody wind — hear it
groan, murmur, exult. When the moon rose it froze the planet still
As Pietro settled over the land. Light rain came. Blue chill.

Epilogue

Many, many years later a ghost wound through a library where every book possessed him. What is it we try to bury in the messy and unrhymed stories pockmarked with difference so complete that only reading backwards mines its hidden sense? Ghost searches all day for the call number of an ancient book to rest its disappearing arm within and find the name shook off like the skin that also used to stick. Pietro the monk became Pope Celestine V, then monk again, then sunk body cleaved from soul, hermit even of life, finally clear of guilt's inborn, bloody lineage and the old prosey fear inside each thousand-year-old decision. Death was a cloister he cocooned. But now we have summoned him out either voiced or unvoiced through the past's tatters, the well-worn cloak badly needing to be mended — ghost Pietro rises roused from our reading. He is prepared to answer these hands hovering over lines of terza rima, for a countryman, not naming him, sighs to his eternal readers outside the gates of Hell: I saw he who made the great refusal. Pietro toes the wide maw of his sentence as either fear or relief condemns a night long ended. He is ready to drop the banner. It feels right.

PART THREE

City of Heavens

I tried to fix the clouds in place with belief
and when belief failed with a
petition from the coastline.

Above the clouds unfurled like banners
of a great windy kingdom clean
of the past, no stain of history hiding

in the joists, no collected quiet memory
sleeping in the rafters —
the whole of it was breath and

breathing.

I could not build it right.
With first rain the towers

came down, with storm
the portcullis cleaved the air
and took on the fall of iron —

pieces of thoughts thought best
or better whispered into the sea
like leaves,

dissolving into the
art of a thousand failures,
the fog of an empty next.

I left the ruins and went home
to rest my weary legs
on you.

City of Refuse

The neighborhoods like petals
coiling out from the center of town

grew accustomed to the lingering
odor of every decision. I finished

my soda and tossed the bottle,
listening for the faint hollow

spring of impact as it arced toward
the heap rising like a mountain.

City of Heizer

We slept outside to keep
the city from our shadows

and ate in the desert's
low balky shrubs,

kneeling in huddled groups
and tearing bread with our

hands until the sun
appeared and we

worked: we are preparing
the city,

the future's details
and its interred skeleton,

*It will have had too short
a career if it disappears*

said the author of these
blueprints of

a language never spoken,
only guessed at silently

in sketches of sheep
grazing, a thunderstorm.

Coyotes whine
when we come home

through twilight.
This is the city

of art — no one
lives here beneath its

guard: it
survives alone in

inward metal gaze,
shadows counting the day.

The sun spins us
into sweat uprising the

girders and digging
the foundations

but this place
throws its arms

around the universe of time
to build it, once.

City of Airports

I kept to a single rule: design without
 the here, yet
 the presence of a window

 dreaming beyond its
 enframing — that weedy land, the empty fieldhouse
 corrugated and streaked

red — interposed the missing and inescapable
 heresy against our
 nowheres: manufactured from

 dug-up and fire-
 worked minerals, I have thrown
 away the world's composite

offering of a candy wrapper's
 blazon, which, distant needle eying thread from
 an imagined place,

 outlines the politics of
 abstraction
 that govern the wide

grasp of weaving
 departures and arrivals, like the wind
 through your hair when

 the car window
 lowers, like light
 bending along the empty

bell of sky to course
 and underline the possible
 paths a cloud of what may follow

Avenue

Shimmering behind the
 humid air, the grey and pink
 columns bare
 washed-out the perfect rectangles rose
 to plot geometries of dream and
 desire this no place, this nowhere
 the curved archways and empty
 arcades improbably swept the
 gardens weeded the fountains
 unfilled but also unruined in wait
 for some rich age or the next
 season to be the only moving
 thing but for the air bending brick
 and cement even the gulls
 did not beat their wings soundlessly
 gliding toward the Red Sea as
 if pulled away from the land where
 no human was anymore, or
 maybe ever though when I passed
 through the shadowed
 frame of a half-finished beach getaway
 I heard a noise like one
 behind me, saw what appeared
 as a figure or the idea of a
 figure thrown out as a cloak onto
 the unknown

in that place old as the world
 along the edge of the Sinai Mountains
 layered like the corners
 of cardboard boxes red on
 brown on brown, I looked out
 from the stories and tales of my
 youngest self across the
 sea and wavering just past
 my sight was a stretch of
 wide, smeared color between the
 hazy blue of sky and the deeper
 blue of water that I knew was
 the other side there are moments
 when the history of self bubbles up
 to overflow into the streams

and various pools of the records
surrounding one and others when
it is future that takes on

body years later I was at a lake
in America in the sun and
though I had not been swimming
much that summer I tried to follow
the woman I was visiting across the width
of it I thought
in the vibrant humming energy of
a body barely able to contain within
the limits of it its red
wants that to cross the lake would
be nothing at all a portion
of spent time that in memory
will be just one more
moment a single little blip
of something not particularly
wanted or unwanted just there
just happening and then happened
so I swam out toward the center
slowly dragged into the awareness
of my body's weight and the
difficulty of going farther my arms
tightened and my feet dropped
to feel the tops of submerged plants wave
effortlessly against me a low embered
fire began to stretch through my arms
until it coaled into my shoulders

I was sinking
on such a sunny day
in the middle of the afternoon
with families scattered
around the lake
what a stupid time to begin
drowning I made it to the other
shore but that is not the important part
of the story what happens usually never
is if it is plot all we are here for to put on
a light jacket and skip out among
cold breeze and the trees full of
personality, their leaves just one more
whisper away from letting

go to document the fullest fullness
 of the scene then one of us must stay
 here in this spot to wait until
 everything stops
 happening and take note of it
 while it does or doesn't
 this story
 is so incomplete, so
 rearranged like trying
 to guess the exact tree from
 the shavings curled
 in one's pencil sharpener not that one
 expects anything else but here am I
 unable to parse these crowded memories
 and say what they are unable ever
 to talk of the women at their edges
 and the love of a year or a
 summer the hooks invisible
 that tie one to another and propel
 like rubber bands one forward
 into the coming remembered thing
 and the me it recalls in the penumbra
 of a new word writing it
 opens in the mind an
 unintelligible pathway seen as if
 from a distance a place to walk
 down, under trees but shackled
by what I've done and
by why I've left
undone the liturgy of confession
 spoken while head
 lowered as under a mighty
 weight there is the dream of
 one who comes from that distance
 to undo it all who I read about, the
 priest of Jupiter, even whose hair
 trimmings and nail clippings were
 buried in ceremony no escape
 into the privacy of the private
 life but must live within
 the office of the order
 I am in it now
 struggling against the thick folds

of what is only half-held and slipping
 away as I try to reach the
 water that will not
 displace itself once my hand stretches into
 it trying by rustling these
 past moments to discover a line at once
 haphazard and purposeful
 that binds this me that isn't
 yet feels so is
 and follows it into the station
 of a future's routine embarkation
 and the amusements of a word that
 once said implies
 the next by sound alone suddenly
 an order revealed beneath the
 will of ordering
 stumbled into but cozy and at least
 partly human for all its randomness

I am bored
 at the kitchen table smack center
 of suburbia thinking lazily about
 the lake in Western Massachusetts and
 Dahab, which means *gold*, on the
 Sinai, and other places, and the almost native
 struggle of getting anywhere at all
 that is somehow different than
 interpreting oneself in
 reverse digging to find the artifacts
 of a past easily detailed once
 enough of them are found another struggle
 exists at the limit of
 the yesses and nos that
 once collected
 I call self

time is no you choosing forward
 but a passive bow to the fatal oncoming
 at the nursing home last week I sat
 to eat with the shadow of a man
 who in his other life was my
 grandfather those parts abstracted now
 into a cloud of recollection
 shared among children and grandchildren
 and the fields he

plowed and the low red pickup
 I now drive borrowed before
 the man drooped and the mind
 retreated behind the hazy
 thickness lolling out of
 the mouth when an almost-formed
 word is pushed through uncooperative
 muscles lips still opening an O
 at the corner in rhythmic memory
 of his pipe there is the feel of body's fear
 when in the body's future
 wake I keep the truck cleaner than
 he did having spent two full days
 scrubbing the tobacco and ash
 out of the upholstery as if the metaphor
 of a quickly coming future
 were haunting the place

I drove my grandfather's pickup to Vermont
 that summer and spent the entire summer
 pretending I was in college cigarette
 ash tapped off nonchalant
 as if I were the father
 of cool smoking as a metaphor
 for breath haunted by the inevitable
 dispelling that the future shakes us
 into seed-future strewn over countrysides
 like summers warm and bright but
 at the edges haunted by the distant
 volcano's ash come slow weaving this metaphor
 is the memory of my grandfather
 animal strong and steady
 who fathered six children —no seven
 but the past-future of one boy is like
 a metaphor for impossibility him stuck
 one summer in a plow I was told
 only the remaining ashes of that story
 haunted by one image
 I can still see haunting the current
 disappearance of my grandfather
 into this non-body like the scent of invisible ashes
 curling from the future's
 briar pipe he carried the summer
 body of his boy from beneath the

plow across fields this is no
 metaphor or if it is it is a metaphor
 for itself the symbol of haunting
 and the haunted thing since
 the past summer he has
 transformed into the father of
 mythology I read about
 in the songs of the nursing home's pet finches
 future's messengers
 calling into the ashes
 for some new thing to come opening out
 like an avenue into a never
 visited place where to walk is to chance
 upon the ancient high priest
 of Jupiter *Flamen diale* and any
 in chains brought to sentencing who
 the priest passes must
 be released at that exact moment
 and then the dream of
 afterwards red fields
 promised by their avenues by what
 is coming from the other
 side just beyond sight this lined pathway
 and its wide range of the leafy
 possible the moment before me
 hewn into a manageable
 size is that of ecstatic
 prospect sunlit or deep
 shadowed divining the same
 paths or the similar or
 avenues of unconditional unknowing
 the newness old things take on
 when remembered after an
 expanse of that stuff of
 once-future the streets of foreign
 cities they that contour the coming
 built from the colorings of past
 repetitions —is that what I felt
 cold and lost in
 the old Moorish village
 across from the Alhambra crooked shapes
 winding up the slight incline to
 look over history's evacuated castle

carefully preserved in mis-memory
 of unhabitation the script
 cursive on the palace walls writing
 the names of God
 as if the eternal can best forget
 whoever is not buried either
 here or in the narratives
 of its country what stories
 that stay to be read in the sixteen corners
 of the Sala de los Abencerajjes
 and the fountain in the
 center where the blood of princes
 rusts the stone and the stars
 let slide jealous beams
 remembering the always-now
 where I can hear
 the rattle of bodies from the
 pool that the room opens into
 where I stood gazing back
 at time

one can take all of it perhaps in
 in a breath even but no
 imagined eulogy can sort the sense
 of these empty rooms

or whatever the container is that
 the moments skip over like the wind
 across the mouths of caves and its howl
 or hollow moan there is the self
 sounded between element and
 absence the unseen passes its fingers
 over the harp of us in more
 generous beliefs and in
 the others a brief noise is all
 that can be managed
 against the stream either way
 exhaled the world is
 vaporized into
 abstraction every second every
 second's second music into the meaning of
 music slow looping backwards
 turning to see the way
 overgrown so many years
 left unweeded by memory's

remembering this rising circle
 spirals to pass the same
 points in a different way the thing happens
 and it happens again at
 another time, called back into
 the mask of being by the inreaching
 and amassing mind to recollect to gather
 and gather again these unrelated bits
 into relation and bind
 the sheaf culled from wide fields
 to find the border
 where ocean becomes sea
 to tap the C-
 note spine of this song *In C* by Terry Riley, its
 single percussive sameness underneath
 the undulating weft of players
 swooning and swanning
 fifty-three phrases cut-up and piece-mealed
 in the morph of a snowstorm
 when only single snowflakes
 at a time are seen scooping
 out the air's angles as if the real expedition
 into the vast
 and terrifying
 absolute emptiness of
 the next line is restricted to
 starting again something
 once done before and perhaps better now with
 the weight of
 self-expansive history
 pushing like an alarm
 into repetition until that too
 is made
 and in its making
 composes the maker orchid that
 through the long invisible
 tending of millenia
 and what hidden machine
 complements the earth's gardener
 takes the draped-
 wing and slender-skinned
 shape of a
 dragonfly everything

doubles back on itself

I was in a bar
 named *The Raven* with cheap beer
 and a TV playing silent
 films the first experiments ever
 with this new form of
 seeing it was the aftermath of
 the 1906 San Francisco earthquake
 and men were eying
 the wreckage in suits when at once
 a man at the end of his middle years
 sat beside me to advise
 me liquidly of the women in the bar I
 looked up and for a moment
 thought of my father alcoholic
 who has never had a
 drink even here the ghosts
 of a past whom one keeps trying to funnel
 into the white spaces make their
 way like the oncoming coming-on
 like the future contained
 seed-like and despairing in
 the lines and rings of past he was not
 the figure I was looking for but
 the repetition unwanted, expected this
 is life's carefully disguised sestina
 this is the
 inconceivability of the period da capo
 with the eternal coda
 and the emotion of these
 strings sweeping clean
 the floor of a room I have
 slept in before in another time pressing
 into the twilit pillow
 and dread air of a visit
 home to some home to a home some-
 where the knowledge
 of the armchair
 and understanding of the end-table
 sketched into it these rooms these briefest of
 rests before the next
 and all of it, oh it all running over
 the air with a thousand canyons

opening wide below
unable to be filled
with these weightless memories
and experiences
what I have done or read or
forgotten still there
is, I remember, another
country far ahead
where history's liberator
is almost lost in the
text of obscure books to come
and unlock what has been
for too long
locked just past the horizon-line
that whispers
and warps in the
heat against the blue of
sky and water
its blur and
messy composition
where I straining might
see myself
erase into what I
cannot
see
until
set up
in the
shadows behind

City of Beneath

You came in the night
 low no-eyed silence

and measured the task in a
 thoughtful moment

that condensed into the moment's
 white wisp of weather

doubting the idea enough
 to hide it transparent

—no, it was you who ran
 hands up everything along

the world's prosaic rosary
 knowing each in its mirrored sphere

bead of laundry pile and bead
 of interlocking antennae

ribbing the stitch-work
 of a thousand beads

—or, it was neither of us
 but some shadowy third

who stole it out from under
 great tug of the tablecloth

bringing along the silverware
 to leave behind the empty spaces

of every thing, vacuums
 quivering in recent

absence holding shape of fork
 shape of gravy tureen

—it was someone far from here
 from some sandy place or

if we are in a sandy place
from a rainy one who crafted

the replicas so perfect
we cannot tell the difference

—but we can know it
that beneath it all

is the nothing of
once-was

that there is a conspiracy
and we will breathe

until the worst of it
is out of us

that we will make what we might make
from dreaming about

what we never saw
even the indentations

or scuffed corners
of

but believe
in any case

its lightning real

City of Storms

I only lifted a finger

to the wind

and along the ridged skin

a world came to

sing with no singer

beneath the quiet clouds