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ZOOXANTHELLAE

By

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Bachelor of Arts, Hampshire College, Amherst, Massachusetts, 1993

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

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in Creative Writing, Option

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*For my mother and father*

**Zooxanthellae** are single-celled plants or algae that live symbiotically in the gastrodermis of reef-building corals

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*An echolator's sense of space*

WHERE WE CAME FROM, WHAT WE DID

I fell out of  
a door key under  
unbroken clouds  
into a still storm

(shoes at the end of  
the hall, tongues cracked)

pinned, listing you  
emerged from a puddle of  
wax (brittle tendrils drew  
you out)

floating in the air  
from the strands of  
skin, moated we made  
a collage

and cataloged animals,  
habits of

## MY HOUSE IS HARD TO FIND

When you walk in there may be a tone. It is not ambient but much fuller. You may experience a tone deafness to objects. It is not soft. That which is not soft is inverted, can be writhing, never with form. It is a sliding you feel on your stomach that presses hard, not as hard as the floor but very much harder. The edges of things dropping off is sudden and longer than a sill. It is not known where they go. No portal, a place you cannot find, a place you find by diving headfirst into a trunk. There can be no splinters (strands of stilled thread passed between thumb and finger in a line). A bootstrap. It is apparent that something has gone awry. The bootstrap not forthcoming.



SLEEPING

*after Italo Calvino*

The leaves falling to the ground were collecting,  
forming themselves into puddles full of sesame seeds,  
letters, thieves making off with the fruit, would be nuns,  
crafting the most delicate animal and vegetable jewelry,  
passengers on rudimentary Asian buses, devouring  
the landscape as they passed through. Everything but words.  
All the while, you were asleep, tied to a limb,  
your feet wrapped in burlap sacking, buried in the ground.

## TO WAKE UP IN A ROOM OF MOSS COATED OBJECTS

the softing stone of day  
comes to undulate the body through, suppose a carpet of wool,  
suppose the air currenting between limbs, suppose there being  
little or no cohesion of a body between one step and another

continually a solid form will insinuate itself underfoot  
immediately, as the foot evacuates the space of contact  
shape melts away, a ceaseless discharge

in the violet zone of evening there is a whirring that nourishes separation  
the shock of distinction felt in every pore of mineral tissue  
chalky sound of voices, as through water, dusks in the ear  
the strobe lit sky foams and buckles

that one single day should pass in which everything is not consumed

*ALBEDO*

We always drown the town, then  
say: *you encroach* Psychrophyllie  
top-dwellers, we see the sickle-shaped  
curve of the borehole, but do not  
believe in the heat flux at the core of it.

You list, a drunken tree and  
give way to a drunken forest,  
you riffled rooftops threaded  
to the thermokarst. The signal  
was very small, compared to  
noise. You felt it first.

We have come to a place a few block beyond erratic. We write  
protocalls for the floe. We wait for the chambered brine  
to make its way through the frozen *albedo*. We lick it  
and sing the birthday song.

## ROUTINE

Some days, the clouds are low. Isolated, thick masses so present they seem palpable, or smooth, linear, and flowing laterally, we gradually take shape as their stream passes over. We come upon a muddy stretch of ground exposed by the tide, slews of aquatic leaves, still green, large, and in shape remind us of the splayed webbed digits of some amphibian - mired and parched. We realize we have come too far and turn back, choosing a different path. On the shore of the saline lake, we dismantle our theodolites and search for the salient poles within. Febrile, our pulses thready: it is time to share the kumquat. We survey the water as we eat. The glassine surface perforated by a legion of tufa towers stemming from below. Wading in with our sickles and swales we carve a vast mineral topiary. You, softly: still freshly rumpled and yet cohesive. I: they have begun to deaden, from their stems and at their cores.

## LACUNA

the body is limp, inert. it goes clinical  
taste of white form through the clear  
plucking olives from the peel.  
winter runs through the leafing, outer  
cuttings file in. how many basket shapes,  
types of glass, witness infolding, preserve  
such clinging. sense of ripened leather:  
find a smaller brush. instances of grass  
under the bed. all I see is a stilted bridge  
and a list of names. wooden plaques leering  
from divides, as through water, underlings.  
dials meddling with the lighting, mistaking  
pollen for strands of skin. comes a sheaf of  
forecasts, pill-dusted, eyed to the quick. I feel  
the way through plank and bulb by scent, am  
haunted by fiber and filament. a shroud is  
buried in the garden.

## LAPSUS LINGUAE

Interior walls canvassing frozen waves of sand - dark pudding walls halting silky  
residue - sinuous lines cresting on uncertain dusk - inverted bed of a prismatic spring

formed in a nutritive amount of cold: this house echoes the sound of only the heaviest  
bells, reflects theories of undulating light in the faces of reluctant ambassadors from

animal and vegetable kingdoms. What lies here came flapping furiously, as tracing the  
oscillations of a wild duck in flight. Come here when you are beyond papers, have flown

directly into the horse's eyes to no avail, can be contained only by bones. I came when  
there was no dark glass at hand, the matter of milk felt about the head in a field wider  
than myself.

## ON AIDS TO EXPLORATION

We plot it out by stones and pebble through  
the gault, the slow take-truths, only relics  
of the former animate. Do seeds of ordinary  
rivers always plunge such valley-cradles ingot-  
like, mind-resistant? You found some tiny  
shells on an alpine mountain top and still  
denied the first diluvian theory. Alluring fables  
of small and perfect white whorls falling from  
the hats of pilgrims did not divert your cause.  
When people lived on salt-meat during winter  
powdered pinches staid them through. *Portalani*  
outlined some approach to the bays, islands and  
headlands, but could not speak to vast, adjacent  
waters. Though we are crude forms, we can  
balance on a pivot with murky vision and on  
starless nights for so long.

*BIOTICA*

They are not responding to our tones –  
the interval of time  
in which the earth rotates  
on its axis, for instance, they had suggested  
is node-like,  
its own movement not seen

but for the skin that snakes over  
as it moves along beneath – we  
are drawn to sidereal  
time and the kind of symbol clocks that  
seem to regulate the way  
the light falls angularly across the lips  
of the rooftops spanning their own  
irregular squares- and still,

the far-off sentinels guarding  
the outposts of our  
systems  
have abandoned their stations

leaving word that they will go in search  
of their own slow and tranquil causes  
tracing the currents which floated  
those now  
subterranean masses  
through time, across the sandy, vast  
plains of Tartary  
leaving a fissure  
in their wake –  
the hyperbola  
of our hopeless paths.



## REGRESSION

### I.

what foraminiferan perspective, it pandemic sweep

wrinkling attention sidelong, the marling of once-thought reef (dwellers)  
or clandestine features of

this whaleflung stupor curdles the air as it sweeps  
through the bellows

an echolator's sense of space mapped onto which of their own:

onesuch we

rigid forms, we collapse under the specificity of our own particularity

in an otherwise bosky, if distinguishable, cellspeckled worth  
all emulate the dimmest sense, at-once abblur at: once-abblur

such doleful seeking characterizes the ablation zone

it's the trickle-down of everything to an obsolete shell

### II.

who swept the tidal remnants onto old gummed bits of winter (we further wring,  
oust that which could preserved for dimmer seasons)

aspiring wiry limbs flank each vessel, each plank, but do not venture  
out to forage

in the torrid zone, each type of wind is honeyed with resin, carries its own  
flaked utterance over, into

III.

in the bone-luck sequel to our stainless apocalypse

we are synonymous with the certain untraceable life forms  
convert fields of truncated longing and navigate the stop-gap  
into paler realms of thought, movement

we curtain the saplings and propose: if we make it slow  
the lime conference considers

## DISTILLATE

what, no ache of breath or streaming  
tissue,

    fiddling acres of hand-strewn  
blades, my riverine windows glaze:

noseprint, noseprint, noseprint fever

waddle home (arcs of the graph) into  
puckered flakes of red under cycle

    whatever lakes are listening: conceal  
your tongues into wickered spaces

one slippered foot beckons the wolves  
to gleam,

    the other wrestles none that  
follow into skeins of treeful (reaching)—

streets brimmed by spooned pot lids  
jelly the once-nooked light

  that turtles  
into morning unspun

helmeted into some certain tawny,  
needles convey the pounding matter

eye for weight,

    scrawled in the folds  
echoed into viscous grey

  each harried  
strand, each webbed thought splays

a whispered branch  
  into a space more  
and less a plate bedded on

  soon enough

resin  
    then a syrup, the structure betrays  
its secret again

## UNCERTAIN DISTANCE

I am trying to get just to the edge of the field that lies  
at the back of my throat. Constant echoes blue the way.  
Angled particles of night for instance, are spilling out of the pocket  
where the hem of your trousers came yesterday loose  
somewhere closer, I felt, to the equator where  
you set loose a breath that entered an ocean current  
and uncuffed a sense of focus figging the Eastern dawn.  
Therefore my view of the canal snaking through  
the cold and still city unhinged the floor below my feet.  
Though an unblinking pole offered up its orangeness,  
the canal-side structures yielded their transparence  
and I could not stop falling up against, into.

BRITTLE CORAL

of a defunct reef  
giving way to  
the  
blooming surge-

spindle cracked note, the muffled last,  
last form the sea would  
call a body  
other than its own.  
Diatomic echolite  
to the drum, tiny trans-  
channeled grain:

your little island grows. Will we  
wash over its cause?

I am at bay here, I will always wait to leave.

*Zooxanthellae*

1.

The cyclonic blur of the world  
is measured with the fixed edges of form.

The memory of a cat may not stretch  
beyond the borders of the territory it patrols.  
Even for a place it long occupied  
particular sills and tufts.  
Familiarity lives  
in the juice of muscles.

When she finished sifting the dune grains,  
they were lined up and counted.

Too many legs and plottable eyes  
signal vast seas of strangeness.  
She glued them to blocks of wood.  
There is the kind of story which can be told  
and the other sort which can only be lived  
in the mind, the difference being  
that which can be placed  
in a physical box.

2.

That a certain amount of the story  
can be washed off, like the arced

crust of sleep fringing ones eyelashes,  
relates more closely to the act of cooking  
than the taste of what has been cooked.

As long as there is a physical object  
which can be broken or lost,  
you can fashion a dimensional plate  
out of the fragments, the vapor trail,  
which can be hung on an interior wall.

For example, several small, white clusters of berries are an aberration, vacuums clinging  
to final fingers.

We will always find a name, Goose Feather, or Dermal Pucker, and then it becomes  
possible to pierce.

The needle pierces through skin, but can also pin down any type or color of blood.



3.

Some days ago,  
several hundred thousand or so  
you may have taken a walk.  
Whether or not you had a place  
in mind to go, we could find  
a medium. Let's choose skin.  
There is a real map to be found.  
We can use imagination  
or diligence. It already exists.

The point is not the wind. We are all several winds.

We become such like she did  
fourteen years ago in the alley lot  
between Market and Walnut Streets.  
As the tires of her bike passed over  
the fallen bush berries, dark and puckered,  
their skins split releasing fermented ripeness  
into the still air dense with water.

The wind was not the weather.

They, she and the berries, became unpinnable, spanless.

A moment can snap apart from itself just like that.

*Bird luck*

## MINING

spiraling down a path between two horizons  
breath narrowed into the dark forms  
by which we were descending —

the sense of movement absorbed through a bone-twittering transference  
inducing locomotor ataxia in the end-fathom.

down here, conditions favor largeness  
and the expansion of orchitic liquid in nodal pockets.

our mouths are as beaks, ante chambers of possibility  
inducing us to abandon our boney holdfasts,  
to dissipate and crystallize on the humming strands.

the glittering grey dust underfoot is vibrating: particles gliding along  
certain planes into new positions of equilibrium.

our milky eyes pigeon the vaulted walls, impregnated with three hundred years of  
sweat. the primitive ambiguity preserved. how we are enfolded.

## PURGATORY FURNACE

### **The Arc**

When there is the task of fashioning  
a shoe for a small and delicate shell the form  
is better sought in a darkness that is  
cold. Find the curve with slicked tips  
and fix it there. This is the way you have before  
soothed the bees and made them small  
and slow. Also, do not forget: each  
coal is a slightly rounded, edged rock  
peering into a vivid humming, trading its  
blackness and form for a texture  
silky and still.

### **The Taper**

This is the opposite of tongue to nape  
or lip to lobe. You must wait for a warm  
thick day - the night should be moonless.  
Now the air will make the fixing, a film  
of lampblack to your arms where the hair  
no longer grows, and you will see how  
smooth your limb through the soot  
glows, know that it is lit from within  
by its own pulsing and you will look to  
see if there is someone waiting  
to stitch it to the sky.

## SEA, FLAKED

What the bark does not exude might be  
found in a knicking: the liquid of a  
salt air fir rooted in sandy soil,  
piercing  
through ever denser rings: a give near the  
core taps an inner channel, stony bleats  
rising from this goat-scumbled squall  
mound are licked up by flaps - snaps of  
planed-out whorls which the night has  
spiraled through and emerged from,  
speckled and tinged and verging  
to whorl again, while below four  
needling a finner right up to the eye  
the cobbly way to this frame, the spume  
shattering off its roof, the pitch of their roll  
and the pitch from the tare, are you,  
in the pucker of that wave, a woolly filament  
sucked coursing into the heart sap.

## CRAB LIGHT

Embayed on the rim  
of a land shelf in a zone of  
submergence, sloping you slip from  
the ponded plate's edge through neritic realms,

through clouds of glassfish in the shallows,  
come to lay on anemonical carpeting:  
cold, green water pass over certain reefs  
turbulent clouds of

in your mind, current sweeps through, and you  
filter-fed, surge in the wave, phosphoresce  
as the blue glowers in the caverns at night – you  
the finlight

swarms of tendrils and a kind of wind  
that moves them, have forgotten to disclose that slowly  
below, something is drawing  
down to greater depth.

You are reminded though, by a slender tactile  
process on the lips of certain fishes and a sudden  
protistan rainfall that here, buoyancy is not equal, and  
surface to the waxlight

sifting through fine sand of shelly bones  
and recrystallize, reflect the internal  
architecture of the local organisms  
whorling out of plane in several chambers,

involute. Boreal subject  
in a palaeotropical kingdom  
back in the northern drylight  
stilling against the drag shortened

and thickened your hinges, lengthened and thinned your  
limbs: the friction masked as movement, the  
movement only relative.  
Drag slip.

Now slip-strike through the crab light (level-driven) with  
no plans to chart the fetch over vast  
aphotic realms - move sinistrally - when you  
arrive

we slip fold *lit-par-lit* across the boundaries of  
several unexplored faunal provinces.

## THE GLASS IN THE WINDOWS

is never  
not moving. It has always been  
contained within the pane frames.

When you come,  
one or more may not hold its eddies.

As you advance, the long cold slope of you  
moving above the sinews, taking place  
in the wake of the recurvature of the storm, is suspended  
there in the plane of that arc. A wet bulb flickering  
below, head cocked, ice-blinks at your bevel.  
In the growing shadow of your contour  
lashes crumble, close in.

A garden of gleaming forks, shoulder-high  
are rooted, not depending on the consistency of the soil  
but spaced at intervals linked to internal architecture,  
Four tines crowning each pierce through the seeing-  
sense etched onto smoothed coarse grains.

Through the ball of such sensing  
on the pitch of this slope  
flue lapses in the blink.

I cannot tell you what from inside will enter  
the flow. If there is a way in  
it will be with a rush sensed.

Footing, come unloosed –  
night-blooming noises will rumble you in.



## ENTER THE CITY FULL OF CHINA CUP SAUCERS

and irreplaceable rain. Burring a well-phantomed path  
an inky mist sustains you, the trace of your cadence  
and gait interlacing the cobbles; they swell  
and taper in the wake. Encountering knots  
and burls as you surge, you notice that many you pass  
seem be retracing a private history of oceans, waving  
stones their own families have waved and lacquered  
before. Lane by road, you wonder how many years  
it took for the great spherical gas cloud to unwind.  
The buildings, malculatures of a former world  
an acid had spilled into, attacking the collapsed  
etching ground indiscriminately. They suggest  
the power of spontaneous movement,  
but you sense that motion is a webbed thing,  
that the walls of the structures here cannot contain  
the fruiting bodies within: they are stinging the wires  
again. How in am I, you ask, how am I in.

## SONG FOR A LAMPLIGHTER

Jupiter stands grove the rounds as you follow  
wending halls – the under surfaces of the slabs

bed and lap, aired through by tail, fixed at the head.  
You weigh the wind-worth and gauge its rainforce to seep

the battens, how liable the slate, the various pitches,  
whether inlets arrange the eaves. Heavy beading flaps

your coefficient for expansion, the manner of laying  
rolls and drips. Your mouth-gowned cloak claws to ear

and the tileclaps, liveloads protected by the wire-wove glass  
glazing the pale-sprayed cobbles puddled beneath

your night-rutched thoughts. Felt and thatch, torch and snuff;  
as if there were moonlight in a dark place.

## FRUIT WEATHER

It was like a sponge of velvet, saturated, softer than  
velvet, more vivid, plum flesh: pockets of air unfurled into

our laps and some sifted down into the warm, cool dirt  
of the fields passing through peaches in the form of melons  
as it sunk. We what drifted among the pockets

were at times as ships made of unconnected objects or  
caverns of submarine thought, where sulfur vents bloom  
fiercely streaking the lampblack mango.

Beyond, glycerine days dissolved  
into an array of fences, shutters, line strung slack the  
difference between blue and gold then frayed, stark again.

## A HUMAN HEAD WITH A HUMAN FACE

I am trying to remember your face, its frosty  
geometry and crystal space-lattice, your eolian features.  
I try to map it, as a cordillera, in relief, and watch broad  
continuous sheets of water wash over it. There  
are deep-scattering layers, I remember, that radiate  
echoes of your interior fauna. Capillaries fringe  
your felsic cheeks, I say, dendritic patterns  
branching your forehead. But saying is not seeing.

A journal once published an article on a feat  
of facial memory by a New York hotel porter.  
With the hats of five hundred arranged  
in no particular order, the porter  
could select the right one for each guest  
without a moment's hesitation. But these  
were strangers to him. He could  
stitch their faces to their hats without  
the burden of having known them.

A dunlin wades through the milk of your eyes.  
That your face is an ephemeral stream  
in my memory, I am relieved.

## BIRD LUCK

She appoints a dormer eave the third station.  
In the hunting respite particles of chatter are swallowed up  
by particles of night, quick as they lapse.  
A window is left waiting for the next.  
A window betrays the deep luster of looking.

While smaller birds affix a thread to triangulate  
their own latched conversations,  
she compares the arrangements of furniture  
from without and within.  
Book nook. Bedroom isle.  
Only so many yawns escape  
while everything that floats in the air  
eventually finds its way to blood.

The biggest eyes she ever cupped were found with instinctual math.  
If there were feathers that would be a symptom and not a sign.  
Inside the house they would become Kitchen Island, Walnut Veneer,  
Backsplash. A moth-balled spell on a room.  
Even our clothes remain strange to us.

## IN TANGLED INTERIOR FORUMS

several distinctive weather systems  
carpeting organs as lichen,  
have registered disturbances.

I am hatching out into the story  
of your tissues and bones.

A smaller body would bind itself  
to luminous abandonment  
and drift from the boreals  
to the doldrums in tones emitted  
as sand passes underfoot.

If these hives would unconstellate  
for the scent of a new moss.

I pass by every unfolded bed  
and glint signals of pulsing  
in pinks and blues. I ink  
onto satellites with boiling bays  
outstretched.

AT THE SANTA LUCIA HIGHLANDS COURT BALL

when we met, I still in the stony-take  
throes of accretion, you rapt in the grainy  
phenomenon of disintegration. That night  
as the bird squawks attempted to penetrate  
the canopy we looked at each other and  
said: *imagine us*. From then on,  
we began to trace, in reverse  
the various paths of least resistance  
worn by the oldest river in the world –  
the germs of a perfect system (we said)  
the cities a single undistinguishable  
cloud can carry (we secretly feared).

Later, I became a deep bay opening  
into the land like a funnel: you appeared  
as an ivory ball hanging from a nail  
by a silk thread. Spontaneously,  
we enhanced the value of our body's own  
lost energy, allowing for the collapse  
of masses toward their central parts.  
We vowed to speak to each other  
in slow, barely audible tones, through  
time, through processes enacted  
upon us. Pure minerals  
that we've become.