

AUGUST NOTES

Haze down in the valley. Like flames drawn long,
Born of dust, at home in dust: the pale fossil of the sun.
pines line the hilly horizon.

::

All I remember of our last drive together:
George pulls onto the shoulder near Arrowrock, takes a piss.
roadside sumac slack in heat;

::

I was young and thought the words would surface
Like a body in a lake.
Otherworldly. Not right for this world.

::

In the out-takes: all I thought I had said,
All day the dog barks at something I can't see.
all I thought was scripted.

::

At the intersection of the vertical and horizontal fold in the map
Is where I'm headed.
There where a hole has worn through.

::

The book will never end,
The way an oar appears from water, stars rise.
what with the footnotes and indices.

::

After George shot himself in his truck, a friend—his, not mine, not mutual—called.
I said, “Who knows what he was thinking.”

His friend replied, “Who doesn’t.”

::

The book of mica crumbles; thus is lost the common mysteries
Of pyrites and limestone,
the common idiom of wind in Washington, Missouri.

::

On the scuffed floor of the Legion Hall, a circle of folding chairs,
A circle of folding chairs
yet to be put away.

::

August notes: a cicada’s wing pinned by a thorn,
crows rehearsing
Their doctrines of ash, their theories of soul-making.

::

George picked up the long-neck empties that rolled around on the floor mats,
Hosed out the bed,
waxed the truck that day, went for a drive.

::

Not a nocturne, but a night roughed-in with burnt cork:
Whether a short life or long one,
the distances foreshorten, cramp.

::

Stoned, George and I sing along with Neil Young on the car radio:
An ambulance can only go so fast.
It’s easy to get buried in the past.

EPITAPH

Beyond the trceries of the auroras,
The fires of tattered sea foam,
The ghost-terrain of submerged icebergs;
Beyond a cinder dome's black sands;
Beyond peninsula and archipelago,
Archipelago and far-flung islands,
You have made of exile a homeland,
Voyager, and of that chosen depth, a repose.

The eel shimmers and the dogfish darts,
A dance of crisscrosses and trespasses
Through distillate glints and nacreous silts,
And the sun, like fronds of royal palm
Wind-torn, tossed, lashes upon the wake,
But no lamplight mars or bleaches your realm,
A dark of sediment, spawn, slough, and lees,
Runoff, pitch-black, from the rivers of Psalms.

PROSPERO IN PURGATORY

Wind ruffles the marsh from sodden salt hay
To kingfisher green, from lead to gold ether,
From shale to slate to amethyst and pearl.

Long ago he gave up explicating the changes.
The footnotes grew longer than the text:
Digressions hemmed by qualification,

Observations overwrought with afterthought.
A recording secretary, he keeps the minutes—
The narrow shoal of fog and first light,

The drag of black drizzle across the dunes,
The shingle of rocks reflected in the delft—
In a crabbed shorthand of his own making.

Sometimes he nods off and misses a gust.
Sometimes he gives in to sleep and as he sleeps
Satan raises up a straw-built citadel,

Reigns for a millennium and is toppled.
Sometimes he wakes to a light so white
It seems the whole world has calcified.

What he sees he sets down as if the truth.

THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKENED TO A DEER CARCASS

What the crow abandons, worms relish.

If I stare long enough at these remains
I will imagine a kingdom undone:

Surveyed. Staked off. Limestone and ivory.
A cathedral built upon a temple.

This bone a buttress. That one a crossbeam.
Every altar stone bloodless and sun-bleached.

Every chapel floor swept clean by the wind.
For now, wind shudders the collapsing ribs,

Swirls up a mote of fur like milkweed silk,
And touches the ruin intricately.

What the wind forsakes, dogs will drag away.