

Thresholds of Finding and Becoming



History and the Found Poem

Debt

We may never know the mystery of sleep.
We don't want to become machines.

But we let our vagabond thoughts run riot,
not like hurricane but like breakfast table,
spread with honey and cereal. And then: falling
over the dog, kicking the ribs out
of the heirloom chair. Somewhere
between the end of the table and half-past

nine, the stock-market crashes. We watch and can't
believe we are watching. And then: hot flannels
to the face, brocade of poppy-heads. *Forget,*

forget-bag of ground pepper dipped in whiskey
and placed in the ear.

We never want to hear what people are saying. We never know exactly what is needed. *Blister Compound, Opium Powder,*

Lint. Baths or Fomentations; Forceps or Pins.

If you swallow a bee, if your throat is stung inside—you are not necessarily closer to the mystery, your own dying.

Tonight I will place a key over your bee-sting and force the poison out. You are very lucky. I don't even know you, but still you owe me nothing.

Excuse

I had rejected every soft-handed suitor, but then one night: you with your mitts and sandpaper.

In the morning my mother found the salmon you left on the beach. Then the seal, the basket of scallops. Like this each night for weeks.

She was anxious to meet you. We had become rich. She rose early to greet you but saw only a bear lurching

out of the waves. We were discovered. You carried two whales in your paws and dropped them. You turned into a rock.

A supernatural being of the sea, that's what I tell people now when they ask me about my black veil, my net and stockings.

You can still see the spot where he dropped the whales, I say, you can still see the rock. It's become a national landmark.

Flower of the Standard Talking Machine

I've got the time, I've got the place, but it's hard to find the Girl. Any little Girl that's a nice little Girl is the right little Girl for me.

Ain't you coming out tonight? If He comes in, I'm going Out. A Bushel of Kisses. Wedding Bells. Battle Hymn of the Republic.

I'm afraid to come Home in the Dark. I heard the voice of Jesus say. All that I ask of You is Love. Then we'll all go Home.

By the light of the Silvery Moon. Beautiful Isle of Somewhere. Come where My Love lies Dreaming. In the Gloaming.

Where is my Wandering Boy Tonight? Abide with me.

Has anybody here seen Kelly? Don't let me Go. Bye-bye, Dearie.

Barnyard Serenade. When you Marry a Girl for Looks. America.

Triangle Sideshow

—with John Dillon

Barker:

Love in all Shapes! Visit my gallery
of Portraits. Wolf in Sheep's clothing or
the Biter (finally) Gets Bitten. Love's
labor lost. Love's many machinations.

Love's lenten lucubrations. Love's tentative
Lubrifications. False alarm—or No One
there. Love in a labyrinth; the adventures
of My Day. A reminiscence of by-gone-times past

ten o'clock on a Cloudy Night. Travelers, notice
the Nag's Head on the heath. Step up and meet
the Ventriloquist, a man in the Wrong Box.

Dummy:

I believe in America,
the voice thrown from the stage.

I will never betray you.
Eventually he told me

how an egg is filled. How feathers
are hollow, the particular service
of the eyelid. What gives

blood its motion, our fine, beautiful
eyes, our limbs arranged in a great order

like fingers of a hand kissed
in greeting. Dangling, eyes
roll to ceiling. See how

we are always evolving?

Has the soul any passion?
Are the soul and body connected?

The men from the Sideshow saying,
don't ever talk to anyone
outside family.

The men in shark-skin
patting their brows, folding their teeth
in kerchiefs and staggering
into the next room.

Ventriloquist:

When you hold your breath for a longer
or shorter time—a body of midnight

outside of the city, a single tone
of quickness on slowness that can't
be measured. Like taking one's self

away, like being away from a place.

I would hang a cow-bell around
his neck like a trophy. My voice
sliding up or down in pitch on a word.

I am your gentlest one.

The Evolution of Rape Law

Knowing that at any moment she could turn
into a witch, they sit the girl in the corner by the fire.

They place a wooden cross in her mouth, cakes of salt, soap.
They place a coin over each doorway.

She says nothing. When they divide up her father's things
to pay for the scandal—his lathe, his axe, his pewter

bowls—she holds her mouth half-closed like a lock
that waits, a jagged outline, lizard or turtle, silhouette opening.

Either she'll lose her name or a neighbor will hang.
It is known that she has been with a man, in a brake or bush,

out in the land. They say she can change into a partridge or
deer, and that the night she appeared in a field

a man followed her. It's true when she moves, she makes

a shifting sound, and sand fills her shoes, filtering
onto the floor beneath her skirt where she sits still
as an hourglass. To try her case, they shave a bull's tail,
grease it, and thread it through her door-clate. She places
both feet on the threshold. If she holds the bull by the tail,
she can save her honor. If not, she will keep the grease
that clings to her hands. Her face shiny now, like
warm meat. Years later she will still roll grease
from her arms. Truth will become the wolf that lurks
in snowfields of her eyes as she sits by windows and beyond
the invention of glass. Her thoughts crashed into again like birds.