

SATISFYING THE CHEMICALS

A Thesis

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by

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Ezra Dan Feldman was born in Boston, MA, in 1980 and received his A.B. in English from Harvard in 2002. In 2007 he won the Corson-Browning Poetry Prize at Cornell.

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## SATISFYING THE CHEMICALS

*Hail. A flash like God's broken glass—  
you've seen storefronts shatter  
at a blow.*

*But white ice rolling's no toll.  
Not all pieces make a whole.*

## **CHOCK THEOLOGY**

## FIRST ROUND

In the tunnel, muttering, hears them  
—clenching their fists and spitting, cutting letters and laws  
and lying, and reaching back for authority  
to the ancestors' books. He's been close to God. He's not its contender.  
He's mine.

Enter his backers and cornermen,  
the pewful of people who'll cheerily urge him in—  
with two, perhaps, who would drag him  
before the *beis-din*. He's slowspoke  
though nobody's dummy  
godselflessly confused as fuck.

Easy experiments madden him, cooked up numbers:  
you eat treif hotdogs in retribution  
for a Rangers playoff loss, the gloves come off.  
But he likes Christmas carols and catalogs,  
parents on the other coast; no grandkids  
make him guilt. Pro-apostasy, his world's  
a happy clam.

Yes, he's gotten out of the old chicken coop  
with his head on his shoulders.  
Says, "I know one ancient language, and I milk it  
for all it's worth" or "I'm no nimbler than a centrist politician, straddling  
the American divide  
and getting his balls chewed off."

If you save him, God, what  
should he love in you?

There weren't any chains or weights. What he escaped  
you can talk about over coffee:

*Heavens! Lend your ears and I will speak, and the Earth  
will hear what I say—the words of Ezra ben Rephael:*



## ELOHIM SPEAKS AN AVALANCHE

Beloved, you do tread daintily; you know the sensitivity of ice  
and stone in winter, you know the force  
of all our inanimate affection, snow-pent and pining,  
awaiting the slightest misstep.

But detect the tickle of our steamy breath and tremble  
at the live speech from the vent—

beneath your ankle about your calf across  
your glacial thigh,

then quiver wriggle shudder shake jitter stutter stumble in the cloud

Come on—Cry out, lost  
in your idolatries: for the caresses  
you drew with your youth to your blackout skin,  
your blizzard skin, your skin  
we knew only by touch  
in the night before we had divided  
darkness and light.

Shout or whimper and we  
will rush down to embrace you from our chilly citadel,  
will settle you  
beneath our dense cold plague.

Fire the gun, slam the gong, ring the bell,  
invite us wholly,  
death-bright, in a shroud to block the sun,  
—our roar of fear  
and desire so equally mixed  
you will hardly believe we are god.

## PRINCIPLE

My God: you say  
I will not change your direction

if I observe you—  
you are

everywhere—  
and not your velocity

because already  
you have entirely ceased

to move.

My experiments do not confirm  
these peculiar claims.

COVENANT OF GRACE

*—If you save me, God, what should I love in you?*

*—With your heart: all; with your spirit: all; with all your  
wherewithal.*

Dig me for overlooking your first flaw,  
not being me; and your second flaw,  
insisting to be. Your third flaw  
was resembling me only in half,  
and that, too, I pardon. I forgive  
your temporality, for which inconstancy  
is a shimmering synonym;  
and your next shortcoming, corporeality.

Do anything. Speak anything.  
Your hands and tongue I have  
utterly blessed, have wound tight,  
have wounded and unwounded.  
What harm can come of your tiny  
incapable hands?  
I permit you to use them.

COVENANT OF WORKS

*—What harm can come of your tiny incapable hands?  
I permit you to use them.*

Twice as fierce, my divinity,  
if you'd blessed me with claws,  
an antagonist ten times as brash.

Soft-handed  
    as I am, foot-  
short, foolish in your house,  
                    will you  
not wrestle with me?

I never do drag loose the bindings  
when we tumble each other—  
we settle  
    eventually down—  
limbs tangled, joints  
frozen in.

Why muddy my mouth  
    if I tackle your arguments—  
you made bees great cultivators, ants scavengers  
of dauntless and superhuman strength,  
bowerbirds architects  
to admire—

if I make  
    do—or hoist  
an objectionable flag, why merely  
meddle my pen?  
    God grace me, God take me  
to the mat.

## LETTER TO A SHIP FOR TARSHISH

Is my name secret? Have I hid it all  
too well? You only need to cry to me  
with bare and splintered feet—then I will spare  
your captain, helmsman, boatswain, and the yawl.  
Each frantic sailor, knee to deck,  
bails curse-quick water as lightning scars  
the flimsy mast and staggered hull and spars;  
each stammers misdirected prayers, tongue thick.  
For them, my prophet, will you not pronounce  
the syllables that check the ocean's power?  
Acknowledge me, my messenger, just once;  
delay your flight and teach me for an hour.  
Ah—you slip between my fingers, swim away  
amid my loyal thunderbolts, my spray.

SELF PORTRAIT BECOMING  
[MY FATHER]

Cry, cry, the turning weather.  
I sleep before long windows,  
    guest of successes, supplicant  
to myself. Raindrops freeze  
    and melt again on their long  
journey down the blurring glass,  
    unsteady as my hand.

Tears never garble the words  
    I sing along, welcoming angels, but after  
we fall silent and my father  
    sanctifies the Shabbat,  
I miss you, who weren't born a Jew:  
    too foreign to the ritual,  
though you matched us taking  
    apart the story of our Exodus;  
we are welcoming you  
    as a stranger.  
When you aren't here  
    no one beside me believes  
you belong at my side.

Hasn't my father  
    already blessed me, how  
can there be so much left to do?  
    The thought runs down my spine  
with a drop of wine from the lip  
    of the designated cup.  
The blessing done, I kiss  
    each sweetened sip.

Never, I know, will we always  
    do this ritual, together in law.  
We will live in our own  
sacred togetherness.  
    I must grow accustomed.  
    We must transmit  
the tremors of our adoring to the city walls  
until my father's books  
    leap down from their shelves.

DEMETER WITHOUT PERSEPHONE

Whose mating is next to dismay?  
With empty hands I have butchered  
and razed the plain, with a will  
dismantled affection's nest.

With a mighty sneeze

—a terror of the soul—

in such a breath the universe was born.

Chase the mother bird:  
murder the rest.  
Shrivel each leaf  
and nude the tree and cast  
no cushiony snow  
on bosomy ground.

Each falling sparrow chick I chucked  
away. I battered every frigid, faulted flight.  
What touch, what breath of contact, could there be?

Everything has failed to catch,  
but I'm not unchanged.  
I subject this experiment to weather.

Lo, I am wind departing,  
self-wishing away.

## SCHEMATIC OF PROCREATION

*Lo tov heyot ha'adam l'vado*

Who made me  
interested in tangles of wires  
in tangles  
of bodies and their parts

and the physical properties of elements?  
Who compounded for me the twists  
of industrial cable and the silver  
maple's bark?

I am stopping  
the momentum  
that leads me home.

Look, a tall dead tree:

if I photograph the gap  
where the trunk parts,  
I tell myself I am not  
excessively lonely.  
I am not kin to this split.

To change the topic: my thigh  
a bundle of bruised muscle  
under construction,  
still functional enough  
to keep me up.

Jacob, let me loosen your wounded leg,  
which a stranger gave to you.  
Let me change your name.  
Anyway when you are dead  
the fibers will spread.

Joseph, I re-dream our brothers,  
scattering sheaves.

*Na*—please—father of my fathers,  
set your hand where I am injured.  
I swear I will take a companion:  
a woman who breathes.



JOIE DE COMBAT

Sent fish,  
with your silver skin and glimmer  
in the eye,

    I pulled  
straight for your gapejaw—  
    begged you  
begged you bite

—craving the bruise, craving  
the physical mark  
for the maladroit  
    flight—

No mark on the forehead  
made you wait.

No possible grip  
    or grapple appears.  
Here's no limb to lock.

    Scourge of me, see, I strike  
to the hard cold bone,  
knowing no struggle will ensue.

Unwhisper to me what you'll whisper, undo  
what you do.

## LECTIO DIFFICILIOR

I am waiting for a difference in the stones  
to grow me a worshipful people.  
Though this is a part of the lecture, I set down my notes.

This god in the desert of Sinai speaks intelligibly:  
My sadness is older than mountains, still  
I am waiting for a difference in the stones.

In my testaments time occurs once only:  
What follows elaborates the law,  
which is the part of the lecture I have set down in notes.

That anyone can imagine milk is a mystery.  
Even I feel the coils of the desert tightening  
as I wait for a difference in the stones.

The child fathers the man, but the man  
kills him minute by hour, breath after breath,  
until I reach his part of the lecture and set down my notes.

I leave my threnody descending, put down  
slow progress to come to care what pairs can do.  
I am waiting for a difference in the stones.  
This is your part of the lecture. I set down my notes.

EPITHALAMIUM [I]

*Zipporah to Moses*

Have your brothers not seen me before? Remember,  
I was black before you burnt me—thunder-dark,  
sun-dark, dark-in-the-eye and more brilliant  
than any godly light. I drew you to the desert well,  
turned fugitive hero, made you home.

But you take me from the house of my father, priest  
to a people whose god got them wells.  
Bandits hound us. Children  
crawl out of our tents, confound us, unfound.

Will you yet make me the great Jewess, the zealot  
who guards your stark law? The snake  
has you half in his hold, started at your head,  
and gape-jawed engulfed you: neck, shoulder,  
breast, belly, loin.

As soon as it disgorges you, before  
it begins again from the toe,  
tell me—husband, prophet—your God  
*can* do good—

No. No!—You're  
weakened,  
do not speak.

Oh, papa!  
Take me back  
again, my  
man's grown scales.

I draw him near, draw blood,  
rub blackness from my face.  
This holiness  
glows with fear—

O foreign God, you say the fault is in our little worm  
of a babe; O Moses, lie there useless: The accuser  
sees me take up the stone,  
circumcise our perfect son—

he wails so  
simple,  
so flawed in his folds—

It revives you, son of Amram? Back,  
back, my doubleheart; beloved,  
you'll burn me with God.

She'll dance you on the mount  
—in the cleft She delights your senses  
with the sleight of Her back—

Her sweet Voice!—  
honey-country She holds out—

I don't dare  
reexamine  
your taste.

Come to me when I'm cave blind, in a fire,  
I desire to transmit your name.  
I will still be she, if you will be what  
you should be—  
I am for my beloved, my beloved for me.

### *Moses to Zipporah*

It was an accident when I flamed your face. You know the smell of that hellbush hasn't left me, and my mouth tastes of coal. The symptoms spread, burst back from my eyes, migrate down along my red red nerves: Holy, holy, holy, the Lady of Hosts, the Purveyor of Plague, King of the Ill, Master of Famine and Drought; the waters, like the locusts, are under Her sway. Since the day I took off my shoes I've been inhabited, had a holy fold in my brain, a painful worm, now even my bony fingers are aflame. When I touch your skin beneath me, it blisters and curls—Zipporah, Zipporah, Zipporah, God swallows me whole.

EPITHALAMIUM [II]

*Zimri ben Salu demands a blessing*

Pronounce it!—Or in the house of the priest  
of the Midianites, do you secretly  
shun the bird-woman, shun  
the children of her thighs?  
Coming home do you greet  
just the father?

“Good evening, Dad. I hear  
God left you a message  
with a roadmap to democracy? Just kidding.  
But reorganizing the bureaucracy?  
You sure have that management magic:  
The Man Upstairs is a fan.  
How come He’s always so hard  
for me to get along with?  
What kind of jealous god  
gets mad at man-and-wife?”

But pater of the people, don’t stick me  
with your namefulness. We’re as different  
as hail from flake.

*Moses to Zimri*

Did your father tie you atop a woodpile in a dangerous grove? Did he curse you  
blindly, as only a father knows how? You may hunt his idols in crannies—attics, wall-  
spaces, caves—but the odor of misdeeds clings to your sleek sleek skin. When you turn  
them up, what will you worship? You swarm among the nations like there is no outside  
anymore, but I’ll die a stranger on a porous border, a blocked packet, a protein stranded  
outside the cell. I wouldn’t speak Her name where you could hear.

*Cozbi bat Tzur to Zimri*

Into the teeth of God you bought me—  
into the fist of this plague. It's not serpents or thirst,  
not slavery, not sickness, not one  
of the poxes God wrought last week on the Nile  
or the fifty from yesterday by the Reedy Sea.  
The full tent of meeting forebodes: Forgive  
you: I know I am it. What hundred  
of your tattered tribe have you gathered here?  
They hang on step siblings and second  
marriages, black sheep and speckled ones,  
a history cobbled together  
out of fragmentary scrolls, dry  
inveterate leather, unvenerable words.

My swan song is God-speech I know  
your kin recognize—when you wrap  
yourself in the prayer-strap, you strike out again.  
You wed your God, he takes  
you up the mountain, he tests you ten times.  
Will you kill your son?  
Will you slice him in the loin?

Know this kiss  
is the last gasp you get if you ask  
*How do I tell one Midianite  
from another?* Unchain me from my sisters  
and previous lovers, my  
mothers from the desert past your camp.  
I dream your dream of dying by the spear.  
How pure to be punished for loving, for taking  
me in. You cook for the angel,  
and laugh at him. Good,

call Phinehas up when you've got me in the sack.  
Hold me from behind, hide my breasts  
with my hair; and may the blow  
shake the tabernacle walls.

EPITHALAMIUM [III]

*Rahab*

How perfectly *Jericho* puns  
on your word for *thigh*. Come  
in here—the walls

are ready to receive you.  
How suitably my name  
sounds *wide-open* to your visit,  
*Rahab* open like a road, like this city's  
panicked twitch. Now how

does my enemy offer me  
my house? In *Jericho*  
echo of *moon*, the sound

of months-long siege.  
Let me tremble before you  
strike me. Let me to my knees  
to plead me, let me feed  
you, a hospitable whore.

Dismay me, flay me—  
say to me I'm nothing  
but a black mark in the lucky sky  
of your white, white thigh—  
I foresee  
each theft you perform.  
I know—a traitor depends on trust,  
on double fear, on a louse.

I tie destruction up in scarlet  
thread, and hang it from the window.  
I won't keep  
your possibilities from you.

## CHOCK THEOLOGY

Dear body, dear brute,  
of whose chief virtues only gods should speak,  
will you bring me close to the scrumple  
of the tumbling Greyhound,  
gone three times over off the icy road?  
You're tossed about, you're shaken  
cap to shoes; you have, you hold, you know  
your purplest bruise.

Will there be an apocalypse?  
Probably never; I have taken a tower down and heard  
no sense in the screams; I have thrown  
the whole world over save one measly man.  
Daily I conjure the torrent,  
daily the destructive blow—I hear you yowl,  
I don't know half your woe.

Body, baby, will you breathe for me  
the sweet dank breath of a cannibal?  
Bring it where I'm banished  
from your calamities, banished before you were born—  
I crave your beat flesh and the splinters of bone  
where my hailstones overturned the plain.

I strove to knot myself  
into material, to make myself groan  
your groan. Too strong, I keep on.

If I forswear disaster, if I promise you not  
to intervene—  
include me in your wracking grief, your sand-blown ache.  
Burden me, burden me I beg—  
my insides astir, convulsant, gnaw  
nothing at all. Acrid and isolate,  
holy, they pucker this tongue.



**BUT THINK US ON**

PORTRAIT AT C

Hanging on the world  
of a distant someone

brief happy vague:

shaped yesterday like the syntax  
of a telegram;

today like the digital grammar  
of instantaneous text;

next She will whittle down  
communication  
to punctuation;

an exclamatory pop  
modulates Her declaration,

will sizzle every instrument  
of detection

and shoot  
like a sinuous dragon  
to the limits of

Engulfing each  
and every lexicon, electric  
zing.

## LETTER

Thank you for calling  
me your sweet pea,  
my honey, my pumpkin, my pie—  
for making me a legume,  
cabbage dear, my broccoli,  
my dim sum, my doll.

For there's nothing not to love  
in a dovey name,  
my parakeet,  
my little chickadee.  
It's an ornament, my daffodil,  
my rose petal.  
Let me be  
your root beer float.  
Be my banana split,  
my plover, my pup, my love-  
bug, honeybee.

Later, my laurel tree, you  
can be my shopping list,  
my boy to be kissed. I'll be  
your handy man, and you  
can be my tomboy, my fuck  
toy, my trilobite, my fossil, my friend.

You're off in the hills  
motionless, snowed in.  
Love, you are inaccessible  
as a serpent: my acrobat,  
my gem.

## DARK LANDING

My lovely, lay  
your saddest sweet  
upon my chocolate knee

your berried breath  
and kingly hair  
and foreign  
and desolate lips

your fevered shoulder  
and sleep-clenched fist—

if you snored like a  
Messerschmitt—

I should smash  
the furrows and drag  
flat the field—

haul you under and unstrafe us,  
ox-cut the sky.

## INTERJECTION

Your bare shoulder on the bus,  
becoming the high ground—*Christ.*—  
it's the stuff of madness, anyone  
would agree:

    spectacular in cream, how the  
jacket has drifted and straps  
slacken: everything seen slopes  
to breast.

    Entrenched,  
        how glad I am  
you've befriended another traveler.  
These many lines may yet hold.

## ELEMENTS OF A LOVER

Scattered like tall fireweed  
on the roadside and deep  
in the wilderness,  
coherent in color,

your name like fire  
in a language  
yesterday didn't know.

Your mixed aroma: books  
and high places,  
wildflowers, burnt spruce,  
turned pages, and air  
fiction has fumed.

Touch a split path reeling  
in a strange friend's forest,  
don't touch time, my tomorrow.  
Travel and forget  
how you escape.

## ENORMITY

### 1. [BLACK SHOES IN A ROOM]

Imperative to be barefoot  
after a stockinged toe to the arm  
on the arm of the vastest of chairs.

Shoes shoved under the table,  
champagne, cheese.

### 2. [BLACK SHOES IN A BAG]

How not to be sentimental:  
recalibrate, reheat, return to owner, remove  
all vestige of sheen—a patent prediction.

Enormity, obeisance overpaid:  
So doctor the ledger.

## SONG FOR AN ABSTRACT DARLING

*Born, as she was, at twenty-one,  
Without lineage or language*

1.  
Murmured without regard to the shape of the ear  
or the color of the hair which may  
or may not be concealing it,  
“Darling” is not a substitute.  
I still don’t know your name.

2.  
Amorous, amorphous as you are, I would never  
let you slip from my grasp  
if I could once pin you down.

Let’s wrestle in the galleries of the Louvre  
or some smoky Roman alleyway,  
where our moves are obscured.

Whatever field you lie in,  
you must feel how much the grass  
loves the warmth of your hand.

3.  
My darling, what if you aren’t  
darling at all, but simpering, even  
naïve?

Reports reach me from Darjeeling  
your footprints have changed,  
though the postmark was probably fake.

I believe your dress  
hangs elegantly on your exquisite torso.

Darling, your earring  
matters more than anything  
definite and alive.



4.

The idea of an Oreo tastes nothing  
like a cookie at all.  
But you, my darling, are delicious.

5.

Drlng, thank u 4 nvr 1ce leavng  
hair in my snk.  
Do u hv a sister? & is she abstract 2?

6.

Are your thoughts as scattered as the fractured beams  
that your eyes project, and that also  
hold the roof up?

7.

Darlene, baby, I'm sorry  
I didn't catch your name.

If at last you appear I will believe in ghosts again.

8.

Of the thousand voices that coo to me  
when my eyes are closed in bed  
I hope some are yours.

Only with you have I discovered:  
love is a pang no pasted word can touch.

THE PHILOGYNIST ATTEMPTS A SELF-REBUKE

You with your artless arm  
I exempt from my misanthropies.

You with your freckles and a man's shirt, you  
with your elegant—arm.

Too thin! Too thin! I know all the structure  
from your taut gray skin—

—can see your tendons  
when you flex your fingers  
picking up a pen.

Will you? Will you eagerly eke  
my advances?

Will you outdo my *done*—?  
I once felt not the slightest twitch  
although you beloveded my chin.

Turn, stand, face: the fruit of it  
belated us.

—but roll your sleeve up  
above your languid limb—  
let's brawn us  
till the know-not-what comes in.

Minute upon minute  
follows on.  
We boombox into amory.

## DAYDREAMS OF M AMONG BOOKS

1.

Lying in wait for a thought, I want you  
to come back to say hello. Crave you, I crave.

2.

There's something awkward about my hands  
in my pockets when sitting down.

3.

One folly is eating. Builds  
one's appetite. What made me realize just now  
I've forgotten to shave?

4.

The answer is anyone so engrossed in her book  
she couldn't imagine me taking notice.

5.

Talked to you with my hands  
(no one listened in). Studious now, if I grow  
weak-kneed later, I'll let you know.

6.

They were glittering eyes that held me.  
The last word I licked across her belly  
began a letter to you.

7.

I honestly admire her twisted  
heart necklace; but love your sacred-pink sneaks.

## THE LIMPING BRIDE

I ask myself again whose dreams I am dreaming.  
They aren't customary—  
so full of regret.

Dream: I awake with a postcard in my hand  
from a person who doesn't exist.

Dream: The overpass runs right through my heart.

Through your new shirt you  
are the same you. I expected  
to steer you newly under my hands.

When I grow numb—  
When I go blind—

I don't know whom I will recognize.

To absolve my footfall dreams, I would fly  
down the aisle on crutches  
or meet you on two wooden legs.

Clatter after clatter: I'll miss what I feel.

NOTE TO SELF

Lean into it—not the kiss  
—hungry as tulips, a blaze—  
or the kiss-hungry self  
—being reckless, playing  
a mere-deep game—

but the burn in the furnace—  
the crack where inside-fire  
—and outside-fire—  
speak tongue to tongue  
and wash and tilt  
a toppling conflagration  
—and the pronoun—  
caught mid-leap—  
halfway across the chasm  
of the plural—

dancing—lean *into* it:  
W e.

## DALTON HIGHWAY

Into the smoke like innocents,  
flashing our hazards.  
We don't know scree  
or flame  
or northern dogs,

we've just learned mud,  
can't fish, can't hardly  
get along.

The sun goes in circles, no moon.  
We slow to a crawl, to cure  
in the burning spruce.

## INTO THREE DIMENSIONS

For words I looked  
to your anatomy  
wanting to name your surfaces  
for the colors, the pleasures they wore:  
    red succulence;  
    yellow shuck;  
    brown bristle, thicket, eye.  
I took inches of you for acres.

Now I want to learn the names of birds  
cubing our long sight-lines, lifting them high.  
Such simple ones, robin and starling,  
I never knew before:  
    red breast;  
    yellow beak;  
fine branches rerouting the sky.

## MELODY HAND TO HAND

We're moving again, the limbs  
sign to each other, deaf  
as flint but more  
articulate. Nor are they  
as unfeeling as shale  
which will turn under a foot,  
grumble among gravel,  
will clatter out unmeaning  
when it falls.

The limb not only looks livelier,  
pinker or browner than amethyst;  
it has its counter-systems  
to crystallization; it bursts forth vital  
against a prod. Touch a limb  
and by God it touches you back  
electrically; you'll feel it  
moving in itself, ten billion times  
faster than a continental shelf.

The earth's magnetism move brains  
as well as stones, they know  
not how; but limbs' loves  
draw each other close  
portraits, and chart and diagram  
internally each moving part.  
There's not a live limb yet  
that doesn't take hurt  
to heart, transmit silent sense.



## PARTICLES IN LOVE

*If an electron and a positron encounter each other, they will annihilate with the production of two gamma-rays.*

An electron is a lepton  
not a leprechaun. What's it like,  
this invisible spin?

A tiny man dancing  
in the golden hollow, under  
your golden hair, or

the tilt of a room,  
under the magnetic haul  
of amber liquor,

the lurch of a satellite  
at its yearly apogee,  
this mothering tug of a sun.

My belly, like the molten core,  
heaves after you. How  
do you hook so tight,

apply your torque  
so smoothly, confuse  
my compass, leave nothing

gyroscopic intact?  
You turn to do the dishes,  
the kitchen wobbles,

the planet's axis shifts. The traction  
draws my knobby  
spine askew.

It's irresistible gravity.  
Infinite range. Not the strong force  
at all. A motive. A strain.

PARENTHESIS OF THOUGHT

When I think you I find me  
ropy and torn  
weary as an angel on a Friday eve  
at the last few hours of creation.

Not, love, that I haul you from my imaginings  
in your hundreds of forms;  
Not: I've labored much for an ambitious god;  
Not: I've polished his works—

I'm cracking like a bullwhip in your sacred hand,  
your grip on my ankle-soon-to-snap—

head accelerating I wave and fall, fingers  
frayed and racing at the nails  
arms in fury arcing to the substrate.

What chaff will you raise and banish  
when I crash into stillness  
—that you wield me this way?

Will I take the pandemonium to task? Make mayhem  
of the Sabbath as it comes?

Hear me—Hear me now!—through barriers of sound.  
As I lash the aweless clouds,

I think us on.

FIERY BABY, TOUCH ME AGAIN

1.

Fiery baby, touch me again,  
climb on, I'll lift  
us both into the blood.

—for your white-hot forgiveness;

—for the quickbruise  
in the tissue  
that contracts;

—for the contracts  
we compact and contend;

Tenderly, tenderly, write down  
our name again—  
for the contact of tongue and pen—  
the mark on my skin—

2.

We threw off the universe,  
we miss it. We can only  
burrow so far—

hunt silver nerves and steel;  
for so long unmesh their lattices—

before we begin to glint again,

eye to tooth  
tooth to fire  
fire to eye.

## **SATISFYING THE CHEMICALS**

FOUR O'CLOCK IN THE PARK  
[WITH HEADPHONES]

To my knees before the hop-scotch girls, court  
built of sticks in the park like witches' bones;  
their guileless ditties and threads.

Demand of wavering, wave-  
offering, their screaming  
belongs in my ear.

But if in a haze the sun made midnight  
silence of the scene? Black eyeburst  
blanking out sound?

Dark Worship  
Child Worship  
Worship of What I Don't Have

The unaddressable geslings skip

over the mark-  
forbidden square,  
the twisted limb,

the wizen, the wither, the knot of not-

being anything I could  
plausibly pursue.

*Hello*, exclaims  
the visitor to himself:

I am bending to pick up the stone.

## BODY, DEVICE

having transpired having  
fluids infused  
having fermented  
or implemented  
a thing

saying again not how  
not luring now lurid allure  
again again your your

more tide than naming more  
naming than tide

suppressing after elevating  
levity quashing levitation nulled

pictures snapped in a dim lit  
cylinder  
magnets smoothing surfaces  
system circulating stain

borrowed compounds compounding  
new flooded folds  
organ saturated  
like a knotted mop

not yet touched  
touching not yet stabilized  
contraction: concern

SIGNAL, ENTENTE

Not only imperfect apples, love—  
rotten, rotting so suitably  
bruised and brown and warm—

Not only worn out boots, unfruitable  
longings—how improbably got—  
undernourished and unflowing I adore.

Signed, unsigned, a kink-limbed  
churchyard pine,  
I stand before your nakedness:  
it judges me unfit or fit.

Slender as matches,  
we're dead dry base to crown,  
our fireheads ripe to ignite.

Then come, gray jay, great  
Obscurer, your faint voice  
berating the light—

I'm dead-stemmed, my skin  
in the trash—to seed  
your impeachable gore—

The clouds mouth, they grunder, they threat  
above hallowed mounds.

Escape

is the awning of ailanthus—  
where gather the very young, and the very old,  
legs locked beneath the weight  
their wisdoms impose.

It yawns so dark the Prosecutor stalks by day,  
damp arm across one's shoulder,  
his transmissible limp.

## NIGHT NOISE

*Ithaca, NY*

No screams. No one I know  
gets fucked silly tonight  
by the boy or girl with the top  
crotch, top notch.

The moon is hazy. The cars swish by.

The crickets are MAD!

I am on my way to the bar  
to pick up the bugs I left behind  
in a small plastic jar.

O crickets! Men—

I cannot undress you.

When the beer strips  
me down, and Buffalo  
rolls away beneath my feet

I sing myself silly.

I'm nothing but paint. I rattle  
the steel as I cross the bridge,

I hear my breath, you hear  
me singing with the crickets.

Bare the energy bravely—

The winter is far.



## A PROGRESSION OF SCENTS

Woke up one day as a horse.  
Never suspected it.  
Didn't know  
how to dream that fear.

It mattered that I missmelled  
horsey—hair, hay, leather,  
the long strands hanging  
stably on the wall: not quite  
my natural spice.

This near my nose  
brings me to another self:  
the very room, the barn  
a cozy bed, each scent  
its proper place,  
    but no vision.

My hand alights a moment  
on the stall door.  
The other side I'm pounding  
with my hoofs,  
such splintering sound.

I hear myself not waking  
from which dream.

THE OPPOSITE OF //

*The opposite of an escalator is a parachute.*

—Escalators possess teeth but do not chew; belts but not buckles // trousers, garments of any kind. A parachute has strings.

—The course of an escalator fixes motion in space. Space unfixes the motion of a parachute.

—A parachute is silent.

*parachute:* Rabbi says a parachute will not open between the third floor and the first.

*-chute:* A chute is like an escalator.

*garments of any kind:* are a danger on an escalator. In a parachute some garments are required. The harness of a parachute is not a handrail.

*course:* An up escalator goes down even if it goes down hiddenly.

Cogs are proportionate to the escalator's elevation.

*a chute:* is like an escalator up or down. An opposite opposes not necessarily.

*escalator:* Rabbi says: the escalator is a category of stair.

*parachute:* Rabbi says: a parachute is also a category of stair.

*course:* The down motion of an up escalator is necessary for nonangelic creatures. Cogs are interchangeable.

*opposite:* Rabbi says: the opposite of an escalator is a stair. *silent:* One can never discuss silence convincingly.

## SLENDER NOTES

*My God*, the tongue slips,  
*I mean*: my father  
who is God of my humor

who got me to synagogue or didn't,  
who didn't teach me to pray.

Aba, I'm addressing you  
on the first day of the year.  
The ram's horn  
didn't reach me, but still

I hear you calling the notes  
beside the bimah  
with your back to me, and your eyes  
in the mahzor.

At home, saying Kiddush  
you look from face to face; you chant,  
the melody subsumes the words

so I *do* listen— walking  
with the long stride you taught me,  
singing the nusach in your voice.

Let's taste sweetly the return,  
on the Shabbat before Yom Kippur,  
and though I leave soon, leave

me your blessing:  
that I find my lines in holiness,

that worship, that prayer.

## SELF PORTRAIT WITH MY GRANDFATHER'S VOICE

Shrivelheart, why have you never acknowledged  
that I was the father of your family  
that I was sick in the very parts  
that should have kept me well?  
You were not born too late to know me,  
you never comforted me. I see my legacy cut off  
after a single iteration. I told them

to carry my body away when I had left it,  
and not to look at me. I didn't leave you  
a thing you could touch and pretend to,  
no headstone, no piece of the house,  
not even my wife, who might have been my spine,  
whose spine I was, who crumpled her words  
out of language, loath syllables  
cut loose in waves. Only photographs,  
already out of reach as I lay in a hospital bed.

Zeidy, your short beard when you kissed me  
and it scratched my face.  
Zeidy, your fingers on the piano.  
Zeidy, a game of chess. I never knew you were old  
even when we misplaced the car at King's Dominion  
and wandered for it in the rain.  
I was as lost as you, as afraid.  
Zeidy, you are shadowing my sleep.  
I am learning to recognize your face.

SELF PORTRAIT: A CHEMICAL MACHINE  
ADDRESSES THE NOUMENAL REALM

A good turkey dinner  
with stuffing and cranberry sauce

garlic mashed potatoes

and a fine salad will make a new man  
or woman of anyone.

Where I come from it's normal.  
My substance is in flux of food,

a nice cup of joe  
can pluck the stars from the skies

to open your eyes; hard drink  
will tie your innards in exquisite knots,

or love will—if it floods you from its secret  
unpluggable spring.

You up here can have only the faintest  
idea of magic, our mutability, what stuff

makes us really  
kick around.

We aren't all essence, hardly have  
ideas at all—they move so fast from synapse

to simple forgetting.

Life is not *like*  
a glass of tea

with sugar;  
honey, I am what I am.

## SELF PORTRAIT IN DISGUISE

When I pull my hood up  
you make believe  
I'm the Unabomber,  
but I just watched Faust on film  
so to my mind  
I'm wrestling devils or playing  
hide-and-seek with Mephisto: I see  
the yellow sac-spider  
set loose on my wall, but I haven't  
checked out yet.

Tomorrow it'll be some other mask.  
I'll spy in *The High Window*,  
will never be Marlowe, will investigate  
the rooms behind the scene.  
When Marguerite stops by my office  
there'll be no one in.

The key is creeping home  
with my right hand  
stiff from holding the umbrella  
and too cold to type  
my manifesto. I've learned  
I can repel you  
with a careful laugh.

When I withdraw to a cabin—  
when I paint my solitude sour  
and pose and grimace in the dark TV—  
I swear I won't send you any  
letters.

## SELF PORTRAIT IN A JEALOUS MOOD

These toes, this little toe, the minimus  
should be mine, but I am  
bones and fibers,  
water, bacteria, blood,

muscle and nerve incoherent  
as any machine:  
I scrape myself on the table,  
I trail myself on the floor,  
a spit in the sink—skid marks,  
new fenders, oil change, coolant  
replacement.

I am not in love with the galaxy,  
with any star that flung  
forth any part of me.  
I wasn't a party to my making.

Nor am I made  
so much as cobbled—  
almost together.  
In for repair now,  
bandaged feeding sloughing  
material  
I might be.

Half the time I think I'm through a doorway  
there's a shoulder left to bang  
against the jamb.

## JAW-ACHE

This thing that will outlast me  
though it comes unstuck from my gums  
and lets go its dozens of prisoners—

could it be parabolic?

What resonance is imp-plied,  
aped, im-

possible

to receive?

[vibration, transmission, broad/cast]  
—the lingering motions, eating  
hearts from cages, livers from ribs—  
radiometry remitting gain to pain.



JESUS [IN COLD BLOOD]

There I am, almost aloft, back  
in the land of idolaters and Jewish kings,  
performing the neat trick  
of not drowning.

It's impressive enough to be mistaken for magic.  
I'm on stilts, on stones. I'm so  
emaciated I float.  
It's an illusion you'll love  
me for: millennia.

Fact: 1959, that's me memorialized  
in a Kansan wife's little picture  
up over the bed.  
Fact: up there, on the cross,  
that's me with no illusions,  
getting no laughs.

## SOME MILLION YEARS

Dear fossil fish, I'm still  
enamored of flesh, I've hardly  
begun to consider what will happen  
when its condition declines.

My brothers and I are not collections  
of brittle twisted spines  
desert roasted where an ocean  
once unbrined.  
I won't grapple with questions  
(Is there anything  
wrong with this?) while chilled air slips in  
and the mums on my table unhurriedly  
drink their fill.

We and everyone we know still  
have several inches to shrink  
before we come to the brink of not going  
anywhere anymore.

We don't even have to think: we use  
our noses: there's damp tobacco  
on our clothes, there're butts on the stairs.  
Old pasta sauces cling to the sink.

Can't I still escape the connection  
between getting where I want to go  
and leaving where I am?  
—if I continue to wriggle up river,  
I might sneak past the dam—

## SELF PORTRAIT AS AN IMPOSTOR

I spy on starlings in the sod patch,  
built stockily to steal  
yellow from dandelions, green  
speckles from grass.  
Skittish from guilt, they fly  
when I approach them;  
when I raise the blinds in my window  
they vacate the frame.

But I'm no truer a blackbird  
under my fashionable  
spring-poached coat—

Come back! Celebrate with me:  
we'll go on TV, parade our colorful beaks  
where no blushing shows—

Our thoughts can't betray us with pinkness.  
Our feathers aren't gray.

TO COVER GROUND

Strip me vein and nerve,  
my body's not too small  
for an entire desert trail,  
the texture of Utah.

I lie abed, traverse scapes the flesh  
of my body has buried—lung slope,  
the violence at the liver.

Dry-grind my innards  
for pigments, and color  
the land.

Dilute me; make me last.

IF

if

these birches, self-similar hairs  
spell out the sequence, same  
as shafts of punctuating light  
in the paperwhite sky:

if

ink, o pen, long-armed  
cross the lie of the land:

if

ice covering the ego,  
footprint, epitaph, melt:

not I *was* here;  
I am.

fi

the next ax next  
to my body,  
my worms at their task:

fi

unclaimed maggots  
between generations  
vibrate indistinguishably:

fi

larvae, livid, anti-  
alphabetic,  
mirror-writ code:

not I; not any  
thing known.

## SELF PORTRAIT WITH SUITCASES

Packed and ready to sail:  
for Dallas a green bag,  
for the empty house  
in Richmond, old brown luggage, plastic, hard.  
There's a duffle for the Rockies,  
a soft sack for a Greyhound anywhere,  
a fancy rolling box for bounding continents  
in the air—even a true trunk  
for a steamship old fashioned and fair. *Baby,*  
*please don't go.*

Imagine the bags piling up  
interminably on a quarantined dock.  
I will never arrive to claim them,  
and this is comforting to the customs  
officials, who frankly are relieved  
not to go digging for contraband  
at the strictest of borders.  
They shape the heap  
into something they can lounge on  
in the quiet hours between deaths.

My hands in my pockets,  
I lean against the door.  
What's checked away is obvious  
and dispensable. I'll keep my wits about me,  
won't miss a thing.

## **OBJECTS IN THE GLASS**

## CONCEPTIONS

1. Not beauty. The un-working, which does the thread bare. That particular friction.
2. The magical rubbing that happens inside the garment. The wear of which one's not aware.
3. Power Absolute. Unrelated to everything—her, it, untouchably ardent, or pure. Power not over, but in.
4. Charity with its own volition and inscrutable standard. We do not know need as it knows it: mystic aspect—ever-attended isolation.
5. Its double-gendered ending—a thing we've muddied and made good. The pear, the egg-sac, zygotic syzygy—compelling can't convince.



## COSMOLOGY OF A GRAPE

Cold weather aborts it  
easily. And plucked  
is it texture or taste?  
suspended or loose?  
full or beginning  
not to be?

The conditions of a raisin contingence.

Let's speak of the end of the universe,  
an old wine, supernova and skein,  
vital invitation through the body  
to vitiate well:

so strong, so small, so lovely,  
pungent impure.

*fragment for Chloe*

One could be intrigued by anything,  
one perfect day.

One may love the voice that lazes  
over the wires, or stretches  
with lackadaisical infrequency  
over radio waves.

It is not, as one thought once,  
indolent.

## THUMBNAIL

A trillion material bits, and 6.5  
thousand million blips on the planet,  
a maze of twice as many prints  
just this instant  
among a galaxy of galaxies—  
not every dream needs these,  
although we exhaust scale after scale  
to breathe deeply of atom and star.  
To dream God, God  
must grow, commandments, like orders  
of magnitude,  
bursting their shells.

## CESSATION OF HOSTILITIES

There is no conciliatory ritual.

Even the bottle's not new,  
there's no company,  
the music is canned, and

it's no one's birthday. No one  
in particular died today

celebrating the Exodus  
or substituting  
sorrow for ichor, ichor

for wine. If there is  
holiness  
what's the blessing on it?

A blessing that praises the rooster  
that tells night from day.

## SLENDER EVIDENCE

In the room, in the last resort  
where no one asked after Her anymore—  
She was slight as an early frost, promised  
to linger no longer.

Who, who—in these latter days—  
breathing out the old smoke  
from the decades of pillars of fire—  
who, angling to amble across the room,  
in actuality shuffling, indecent approach—  
who could manage this slim trim truth  
to woo?

She skips like a slip of grand  
daughter away,  
like a scrawny dollar, gone in the wash.

O clutch—o hug—She,  
but barely seen, is no more  
a waking dream. Away  
with her almost certainties. Let us remain  
as unaffected  
as frost by rain.

JANUARY STILL NO WINTER

Like waiting for a letter, the waiting  
does no good. The thing has got precisely  
out of hand.

But scale a pint and from there fall  
through funnel, then through wait.

Snow may alarm you like the postman's  
tread on the porch  
and make each dizzy sense  
believe it has never been satisfied  
this way, honed  
and limpid,  
alert to the least impingement  
(to perceive at best:  
to have one's casement cracked)—

but if snow goes  
and a new-frosted afternoon  
gently knocks,  
let it call you  
unexpected lover.  
Let it in: and let it  
bring no gift.

## DOG EARS

One more attempt  
to punctuate the fiction  
that punctuates everything  
else—

invading a corner  
where two walls meet  
implying

a short-haired girl  
in a string  
of long-haired girls

brushing themselves out of line

like a broken bone

in the contiguity  
of the body

or a tiny whirlwind  
tossing leaves in celebration

as though something  
happened here.

## A BOWL OF CEREAL

Unhappy Banana, hanger-upside-down, mouth as sad and fine as anything once green and unripe, meet screaming Strawberry, flinging his seed. Morning after morning, unglamorous hug—How ugly are things in their true appearances? (There is raw straw in the field where the berry grew, which brushed him red and sucked sweetness, then lay down dry. Its texture is the street cleared of gravel by murderous trucks, of coarse hair by a wind both foul and fair.) By the eighth day you've eaten out all the sorrow you could find. You hunch—your spine's bent beautifully over the table, you twitch to be touched—

till a cruddy grudge from one of the taut blue spheres atop the toasted grain in the tub ruptures the bruise on the browning peel, lets loose the mealy mush not much can be done to improve. A sputter in the hand: a clamor in the sink, shattered ceramic. The splattered milkwater dripping out the hour, out the drain through the crack in the pipe to the cabinet floor.

It is wishing everything damp; it is wishing  
each thing. We have said not only. We have  
said we promise, and promised; we promise not  
to. Just water won't do for the deep bruise. No  
breakfast will break it away. As soon as we hope  
we will be satisfied, we're satisfied,  
hurried, untrue. But unsatisfied, sad  
and fine—don't know what to do.



## THE GRAVEN IMAGES

We fray the plunging valve  
then wake down from the strain.

Leach spit clamp—  
from the last gurgle of a dream  
words stand and lapse  
like a wracked forest  
or the tide done with whipping  
at the rock.

KNEEL: *Your granite cock, my marble yen...*

MEDUSA: *Adore!*

Our cold sweats run dry.  
This ghostly banishment.

PILFERED SCENES [FOR PNIN]

1.

The establishment that he *frequented*  
*from sheer sympathy with failure*  
was more of a dusty spoon,  
in the hold of which he scrawled a few characters  
in a Slavic tongue.

From behind these, his own  
half-recognized visage peeked,  
bent into and over itself  
in sincerest scrutiny.

*'My, what a lovely thing!'*  
*cried Betty* at the sight of it.  
The promptest compliment I ever saw  
accompanied the faintest gesture  
towards the object's one flaw,  
*a shadow behind the heart.*

2.

She's *so young, after all, and so vague*. Dear Professor,  
if it is any comfort, you were never like this.  
You have been old since you were an infant  
sucking your wrinkly fingers,  
older than I can count.

But you bow-bowed to that *vaporous bride*.

How could she become an object of jealousy  
when patently  
she was no object at all? She strove  
so to dissolve. She faded  
in another delightful embrace.

He was one she'd *adored from afar*  
*before drifting into insanity*—although the evening reports  
contraindicated any wind and omitted  
whether she wafted closer or further  
from her lover, whether he did anything at all  
to direct her pitch and yaw.

3.

The professor finds refuge  
in a *pencil sharpener*—that *highly satisfying,*  
*highly philosophical implement.*

He puts his angel to the test. Will it chew  
her tip-top gala up, or polish  
the dance floor on cue?—  
a Zamboni in the interval,  
among hors d'oeuvres *the colors of shadows.*  
(He never doubted these exist,  
though red and green might have been  
identical twins.)

4.

Next stop, *an ageless blond in aqua rayon,*  
a variety of bombshell which  
has been obsolete now for nearly three decades,  
but which certain experts argue  
may appreciate in value, as an antique.

He calls her *the evil designer—destroyer of minds—*  
but she's only his personal  
tormenter, with little invested in invading others'  
thoughts. Careful, Sir, she won't get caught  
in your quagmire; she's marshalling her forces  
for decisive assault: *What*  
*is your salary, Timofey?*

Enough to continue alive on, if not to live. O  
*that bashful slyness of hers.* We can only say  
foxes such as she have no business feeling shame,  
or else that slyness  
doesn't suit such simple chipmunks  
face in paw.

5.

*'Ping-pong, Pnin?'*  
Perhaps prematurely.  
Possibly a point per person. Please,  
permit presentation of pointillist paddle, panting  
participant, pugnacious pun. Play on,  
play, play permanently;  
prohibit palaver, persist.

6.

He doffs his hat. He offers *withered*,  
*soundlessly clapping hands*, so awfully theatrical—  
that's why she spurned them: flattery  
must disguise itself more successfully than that.  
The two hands yammered only as much  
as one hand would,  
though they'd promised more.  
'*Would he please telephone for the taxi?*'

7.

It was not a walk anyone was looking for, that ramble  
through a virgin novel. Not even  
the author had mapped it; we bushwhacked it; no authority  
stamped our efforts or commanded we cease.

By the back cover we were pageworn, an hundred blades  
had cut their ragged way across our fingertips  
crisscrossing them in Cuneiform. An hundred  
ghosts had hounded us, haunted where no man read.

*He made the Russian 'relinquishing' gesture.*  
Decent indeed, decidedly diffident:  
Give up the thing, but salvage  
a dozen dry measures of self.

## EPIGRAMS FOR AN EARWIG

The earwig wiggling, a small pig  
in the letter pit, a pickled  
orange plum.

The ear in the eye  
opens up.

The wig for the small hairs  
itches the skin.

The big wig contains incarnadine,  
it incorporates a corporal.

The confederate earwig rigs juries,  
sips on hearsay each Tuesday.

The nosescarf isn't to the earwig what a stiff  
snigger is to the littlest laugh.

An earwig in the jigger, popcorn in the popper,  
coal in the hopper one hoped.

A wiser wicker sprig pegged the glib ligature  
with an aglet.

The aglet didn't give a fig  
for the earwig.

## MECHANIC

Impossible to think the same spring  
in the woodpecker's neck and beak,  
unwinding, drives the hammer  
with such neat regularity against the trunk  
of the uncomplaining tree—

as twists beneath my head to bring  
my eardeck into range. They seek,  
unfinding, what drives the clamor,  
despite the tug to the trunk  
that carries them off, feet breaking free—

NIGHT WATCH

*as the sentries till morning yearn for morning*

Soon light will spill into the air.

The first trickle at the start of rain  
reveals a slope's hidden vein, then overflows

the banks become impossible /

imagine:

What could possibly be the source  
of this birdsong

which I have heard for hours?

So indifferent to the breaking day

/ imagine the bird to be blind.

SUE

Say the few tall clouds are motionless  
as mountains, and sunlight isn't for you—  
neither is true. In the clouds  
the water breathes itself through its states  
and finds itself finally in its element, and you  
are at a loss only in this field of hue,  
this parking lot, this long traveling-through.  
When you arrive, the sun will beat down  
on the desert green and brown.  
You will soak it in and store it away.  
You will admire the motionless mountains  
that keep the clouds at bay.



## TRAVEL NOTES FOR M

*Arms that are braceleted and white and bare  
(But in the lamplight downed with light brown hair!)*

1.

Letting my goofy smile rain  
on all the other strangers.

2.

A messy woman in a purple sweater  
brushes off crumbs.

3.

These little caps, in army colors, tall  
with tiny brims: I don't think they'd suit you.

4.

Thought: poems come in sketches, too.

5.

This woman unwrapping her candy bar,  
opening her mouth, repulses me.

6.

For the moment it's hot on the bus,  
the way it was in bed.

7.

Pebbles in the rain: they show  
bright colors to anyone.

8.

Recollection: copy editing a poem  
is a pain in the neck.

9.

Question: Did you dream anything last night?

10.

Quotation: Icicles filled the long window  
with barbaric glass.

11.

Joke: A billboard says, RELIABLE.

12.

On the 42<sup>nd</sup> floor my ears  
at first complained quietly.

13.

Setting: Monticello. Awake, briefly, sun.

14.

Binghamton: The entire sky is shifting with the wind.

15.

Winter at last: the snow hits on the walk home,  
on balance, making an assertion.

## NUDE MAN ON A HORSEHAIR

He sits with the apples  
of the universe, carefully  
composed  
and silent as the very last accomplishment  
of a true charioteer.

Nothing happens, and this, a fact  
however it is  
begins not to matter at all  
as the suns of an orangutan's eye sleep.

They sleep like sixteen assholes  
in the tree of knowledge of evil.

And the hair pricks Him like a nettle,  
too expected a prick  
to be enticing.  
And so—

All the last encouragements go  
unheard through the jungle of  
*—How can you have a jungle OF?*

The man nude or not.  
He, the Man.  
He unlyricizes, and then.  
He unlyricizes and eats  
the missing moments—  
    what You and I have never  
missed at all, only let silently slide.  
The man. The nude Man  
on the horsehair.

## NOTES

### CHOCK THEOLOGY

“First Cause”—“Heavens! Lend your ears and I will speak, and the Earth will hear what I say” is adapted from *Deuteronomy* 32:1.

“Elohim Speaks an Avalanche”—“Elohim” is a plural name of the Old Testament God and also means “gods” in reference to the pagan gods of the Bible.

“Covenant of Grace”—“With your heart: all...” is adapted from *Deuteronomy* 6:5.

“Letter for a Ship from Tarshish”—See *Jonah* 1:3.

“Schematic of Procreation”—“*Lo tov heyot ha’adam l’vado*” (it is not good that the man be alone) is from *Genesis* 2:18.

“Lectio Difficilior”—The title refers to the principle of textual criticism, *lectio difficilior potior* (the more difficult reading is the stronger).

“Epithalamium 1”—For the midrash of the snake, see Rashi on *Exodus* 4:24; “Holy, holy, holy, the lord of hosts” is from *Isaiah* 6:3.

“Chock Theology”—“*of her chief virtues only gods should speak*” is from Theodore Roethke’s “I Knew a Woman.”

### BUT THINK US ON

“Portrait at *C*”—*C* is the speed of light.

“Song for an Abstract Darling”—The epigraph is from Wallace Stevens’s “So & So Reclining on Her Couch.”

### OBJECTS IN THE GLASS

“Pilfered Scenes [for Pnin]”—Italicized phrases are from Vladimir Nabokov’s *Pnin*.

“Night Watch”—The epigraph is adapted from *Psalms* 130:6.

“Travel Notes for M”—The epigraph is from T.S. Eliot’s “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”; “Icicles filled the long window with barbaric glass” is from Wallace Stevens’s “Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird.”

“Nude Man on a Horsehair”—Titled after Matthea Harvey’s “Nude on a Horsehair Sofa by the Sea” in *Pity the Bathtub Its Forced Embrace of the Human Form*.