

## The New Intelligence

After knowledge extinguished the last of the beautiful  
fires our worship had failed to prolong, we walked  
back home through pedestrian daylight, to a residence

humbler than the one left behind. A door without mystery,  
a room without theme. For the hour that we spend  
complacent at the window overlooking the garden,

we observe an arrangement in rust and gray-green,  
a vagueness at the center whose slow, persistent  
movements some sentence might explain if we had time

or strength for sentences. To admit that what falls  
falls solitarily, lost in the permanent dusk of the particular.  
That the mind that fear and disenchantment fattens

comes to boss the world around it, ugly as the damp-  
fingered guest who rearranges the cheeses the minute the host  
turns to fix her a cocktail. A disease of the will, the way

the false birch branches arch and interlace from which  
hands dangle the last leaf-parchments and a very large array  
of primitive bird-shapes. Their pasted feathers shake

in the aftermath of the nothing we will ever be content  
to leave the way we found it. I love that about you.  
I love that when I call you on the long drab days practicality

keeps one of us away from the other that I am calling  
a person so beautiful to me that she has seen my awkwardness  
on the actual sidewalk but she still answers anyway.

I say that when I fell you fell beside me and the concrete  
refused to apologize. That a sparrow sat for a spell  
on the windowsill today to communicate the new intelligence.

That the goal of objectivity depends upon one's faith  
in the accuracy of one's perceptions, which is to say  
a confidence in the purity of the perceiving instrument.

I won't be dying after all, not now, but will go on living dizzily  
hereafter in reality, half-deaf to reality, in the room  
perfumed by the fire that our inextinguishable will begins.

## To His Debt

Where would I be without you, massive shadow  
dressed in numbers, when without you there  
behind me, I wouldn't be myself. What wealth  
could ever offer loyalty like yours, my measurement,  
my history, my backdrop against which every  
coffee and kerplunk, when all the giddy whoring  
around abroad and after the more money money  
wants is among the first things you prevent.  
My phantom, my crevasse—my emphatically  
unfunny hippopotamus, you take my last red cent  
and drag it down into the muck of you, my  
sassafras, my Timbuktu, you who put the kibosh  
on fine dining and home theater, dentistry and work  
my head into a lather, throw my ever-beaten  
back against a mattress of intractable topography  
and chew. Make death with me: my sugar  
boat set loose on caustic indigo, my circumstance  
dissolving, even then—how could solvency  
hope to come between us, when even when I dream  
I awaken in an unmarked pocket of the earth  
without you there—there you are, supernaturally  
redoubling over my shoulder like the living  
wage I never make, but whose image I will always  
cling to in the negative, hanged up by the feet  
among the mineral about me famished like a bat  
whose custom it is to make much of my neck.

## The Dream of a Poetry of Defense

As pendulum. As wind. As an ever-changing mutual voice.  
As consciousness, sympathies, chords of speculation.  
As to prolong speculation plastic and within. As copious

as infancy. As infrastructure to the most invisible  
indestructible flower. And infinite. As infinite as pleasure  
apprehended through excess. As cross-fertilization

of intelligence and cloud. And as light, and as energy.  
As all related instruments indispensable to choruses.  
As being differently indispensable. As being harmonious.

Whatever echo, cadence, or strain from the catalogue  
of meaningful music, deep in the midst of its composition:  
a proposal for living, an epitome, a permanent spark

through American darkness, barbarous as nightingale  
awakened in a laboratory, hidden from the world  
in its thousand details. As ancient armor around the body

deformed by protection. As pains against fragments  
in an epoch of drama. As danger period, a distorted history.  
As dance without music, as passion without capacity.

As exactness equal to any example. As under this thin  
guise of circumstance. As if internal Minneapolis.  
As enlarged by sorrow, terror, wheresoever I decline.

As against decay of liberties, as against misapplication,  
monster propagating and the extinction of softness.  
As overzealous as a number. As when the degradation

distributes itself as workforce venom, paralyzing  
citizens in vivid architecture. As from the great faculty  
an effluence is set forth. As episodes, as footsteps.

Whatever evil agencies will thicken and exacerbate.  
Bewildered anomalies. Extraordinary drawbacks.  
As convulsions nourishing their course with strength,

and expeditiously. As national vapors. As theatre wrecks.  
As at successive intervals the exhausted population  
penetrated caverns. At drowse. At impossible to feel.

The full extent of sympathy considered a mistake.  
As the dregs in the sensible. As in paradise stamped  
in sleepless surveillance and proceedings of state.

But as inmost, a starry flock. As connection, an attaché.  
And the still overflowing inextinguishable source.  
As first written waters, as burning information.

We can advance the fountain. We can define foundation.  
As awakened a shadow, as a vessel of assurance.  
Let portions of our being. Let chapter the invention.

We want more brightness than money can imagine.  
We want what arises from the passages between  
mind management and the exasperation of anatomy.

Yoke evanescent wonder. Reanimate the blunted.  
The mind which directs the hand is not vanishing.  
Let laundering. Let mechanism turn to potable song

and highest human flight. As illustrious as trumpets  
awakening washed garments. As manifestations  
of the long electric work. Let gathering a nation.  
Let the end of the battle be astonished birth of person.

Originally appeared in *The Modern Review*

Note: "Dream of a Poetry of Defense" is composed of words taken from successive pages of Percy Bysshe Shelley's *A Defence of Poetry* and randomly from *The 9/11 Commission Report*, Sec. 13.5, "Organizing America's Defenses in the United States."

## The Driver of the Car Is Unconscious

Driver, please. Let's slow things down. I can't endure the speed you favor, here where the air's electric hands keep charging everything, a blur of matter fogs the window and my mind to rub it. Don't look now, but the vast majority of chimpanzees on the road's soft shoulder can't determine: Which fascinates more, the thing per se or the decoration on its leaking package? How like us, they—

(The hand mistook me that arranged my being bound here, buckled. I have been mistaken, ripped from a wave of in-flight radio: wakened brutally is brutally awakened, plucked from the grip of "asleep on the slope of an open poppy." One has meant this torture for another, clearly. Do we welt the same, make similar whimper? Did he take my name? I'll take another.)

it is the decoration. By which I mean—we have a lot between us. You're European, and I have been to Venice where the waters pave and they can't play tennis. Fair gondolier, it is my pleasure to confess: nor will you ever catch me in athletic dress, hunched waiting at the net for a ball knocked fast in my direction, hot with fervor to knock it back to the opposing player. It just won't do.

Driver, please. I have shared with you. I have become a person. That's supposed to make it hard to hurt me. The future rises, bellows, wrinkles. I can't keep living in a cramped sedan, I won't keep living in a cramped sedan—though you hold the road, I'll give you that. There are instances of smoke and mirror, instances of shouting fire. Though you hold the road, I'll give you that, there are

instances of "sticking to it" that I can't admire, and ours isn't an adhesion I ever expect to look back on wistfully. But that's for time to decide, not me. "Just around the corner, there's a rainbow in the sky."—Haven't you ever just had to believe it? Look, if it's a cup of coffee you're after, I bet there's someplace brilliant up ahead. I bet there's someplace right around the bend. Ash in the eye

and the nose and the mouth, shit in the pants and the mouth and the hand. Hound on the back of the hand and the lap, slap on the face of the hound and the ass. Ash in the eye and the nose and the mouth, mouth on the nose on the face in the pants. Hound on the back

of the hand in the lap, shit on the face of the hound  
in the ass. Ash in the eye and the nose and the mouth and

the mouth won't stop, it comforts itself, it comforts me.  
Funny I keep on looking out the window, identifying  
even as you do this. The orchids cry that yesterday were pollen  
ground in the fuzz of dead-drunk bees. I will not submit  
to being ferried that way. Driver, please. Where to now,  
Tierra del Fuego? There is no travel but the travel that concludes  
in shrieking with abandon, is there? —No. What you need

is to remember what it felt like beforehand, that emptiness.  
Call up pictures, melodies, etc., but part of you will resist  
that assistance, divide from it. Drag the edge of that memory—  
yes, it's more like forgetting—across that divide, until  
something like a rabbit-hole opens inside you. Vanish into the hole.  
Vanish, it is your only opportunity. It will stun you  
for another minute, but when the stunning passes, you will again

be nowhere, nothing, and even more at peace with it.

Originally appeared in *Twenty-seven Props for a Production of Eine Lebenszeit* (Grove Press, 2008)