

Donate Here

Poverty Poems 2008
written at Squaw Valley

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Deformity

attention / here's to disfigurement
 |—pay it
 stare to learn / deformity the relaxation
 an insubmission to regulation
 nose bridge spread out beneath the eyes
 baffling / the eeriness of deformed existence
 |—to doctors
 I wonder how the great theoreticians / would approach
 |—of beauty
 its dis/covering / breed of invisibility
 vendible at the tops of trainstation stairs
 badly healed wounds / sweat over rain drenched shrouds
 such things can be returned / by the balm of excess
 |—to flawlessness
 cash / why we bury the dead
 but a vendible commodity / disfigurement
 more entrepreneurial than leprosy
 think of the last one / you passed by
 |—cup in her teeth
 afraid of armlessness / the intimacy
 of putting your fingertips
 by her lips at breath turn
 no less than Adam Smith
 would declare such / among the rich
 |—beings / interruptions
 able to appear in public without shame

the walk was short
 cool night / narrow
 streets / in front of a brick home
 on the stoop right here as we walked by it
 a woman sat behind her clay face / her everted appearance
 talking to someone on the other side of the world
 cup by her side / the smell of urine soaked
 into cotton

a woman well dressed opens the door
 her friends over for a chatty interruption
 she feels proud of her choice
 to purchase the scented candles that make her home's odor baking apple pies
 she watched ads and figured
 this small bit this small touch would enlarge
 her life and her family's / the smell of apples blushed
 by cinnamon

Notation:

Lines like this:

ABC / GHI
 |—DEF

have the syntactic sense as if written like this:

ABC DEF GHI

but the reader is instructed to imagine an unusual oral presentation, perhaps a second voice speaking DEF at the same time GHI is spoken.

Pain

*the particular pain poverty affords is named hunger not pain
by those who reckon pain as accident*

down sloping sidewalks
between housecrates two chicken widths apart
a shack of planks crisscrossed and nailed gaping
provide their courtesy to mosquitoes and rain
a vinyl tarp / blue
harvested from discards where boats unload / for a seat
this is home to a broken toothed woman
she recalls men passing through her
like illnesses leaving pregnancies behind
she serves tea batched
from makings never strong never sweet
from a river fish save her from hunger
but healing costs excess
without it her bandaged knees and toes remain flawed
her crooked hands
her unearned sexlessness

after tea she sits
legs folded under / her
feet pointed out the back
she searches her unplanned borders
for a hunger to sell / something exceeding
mishap / her's is the dirty side of the world
her role is to live at the wrong end
of the bell shaped curve
at the other end the funny men
take pills for their pain

Accident Prone

when the rain hits
the streets become a different sort of black
an inviting black that welcomes rapists and murderers
along the wall that forms the street
the blue paint that glows in the streetlight
becomes part of the yellow world even in the fundamentally blue rain
fidgiting headlights single out her lips / her green eyes
lamps through tenement windows shine
small pockets of safety down the street
tottering fences / busted bricks / plastic bags / styro boxes with torn-open tabbed slots
grey night sky over dark roofs bleak as streetlights on a grey puddle
this is the yellow time
the prostitute exhaling the breath of poverty
walks away with the wrong man
the runaway wrapped in a newspaper
starts to shiver and never stops
the sister who bags her day meal in the oily alley
where garbage is mixed with rubble and sand
is never identified / never makes it out of the bag
that keeps the bullets from tumbling away
if any accident of wealth had intervened
small bright pools of safety would grow
risk would pass by / recovery would replace decay

she has read
when the rain hits
the streets will become a different sort of black
an inviting black that welcomes the lovers
who have just put the first forkfuls of their first meal together
into their destined to kiss mouths

Numbness

*drudgery can be improved by diminishing consciousness;
knowledge is the heaviest stone*

he came up the street
to the spot where a man was loading
his brother onto a wagon bound for the ER
to be patched up

to the west the sun was setting
after a series of cool breezes
and purls of gunfire

he needed to earn 20 dollars a day
to live on the outskirts of wealth
but earned that only once or twice each month
he figured one day he'd return
to his home / his fault
is no one's fault

mountains to the east faced the possibility
of echoing stoically and vagrants pushing
their carts down the wrong street
could not be blamed for pausing and looking back

he said the night rain froze his coat
and wind tipped the fire can onto his legs
was ok

I drove past apartments that night
one seemed dark when I stopped
but through a gap in the blinds I saw
a dim light over a bed
and a picture of lovers
the frame corner only perfectly
visible and sharp

Estrangement

DONATE HERE
help keep me out of your neighborhood

Mary is kind of a loner

*who knows what your friend's done
maybe she'll start shooting / maybe she'll draw gunfire
you never never know*

Mary sleeps two places
the lapsed church
where an aleatoric event
determines who gets a bed
and in a hole under a graveyard wall
not near the center of the city

one night returning to her hole she got raped
there in his stalking ground he (in the usual way)
grabbed / choked / threatened
in the end he agreed to protection

Mary's face is toneless / her flesh smells / she has wide brown eyes
when she fell asleep later / her head in my lap
I could see lice like lace in her smoky brown hair

she took her raper's dropped cap
to her social worker who gave it to the police

I wanted to snap Mary for this poem
but she feared to let you see her

tonight Mary was playing it safe
she didn't come downstairs
because she would lose her won bed
I talked to her on the house phone
two grim police came in
I asked how she would sleep tonight

*I'm thinking of you
be good*

I wish this were all / I mean isn't it enough? / turn the page
for the final scene which is about estrangement and war eyes
set where the overstimulated overeat

walking back to my hotel two streets up from the blueblack river streaked streetlight yellow
I stopped to stare through the fogged window of a French restaurant (was it attractive? / full?)
before I could move on a close cropped man (ex-soldier?) looked away
from the woman with serious eyes across the table from him
about to photograph herself
and in much less than a second
studied me / decided me no threat / turned back to her
just as her hair fell aside
revealing her pierced ear / the flash

Invisibility

*culture like poems
shapes by constricting*

by the river a hot drink
is passed around against the clutching night
and hampering mist that rises
up in the rain from the river rushing past
behind a row of wind breaking trees
one who is poor fellates one who is not

what you and I may take as institutionalized dependence
another may see as cherishing and respect

suddenly he finishes his meal
rises from the table
takes 20 steps and resumes his invisibility
his blue cap pulled down tight
over his sweaty black hair
when I left he was gazing everywhere
but not at anyone
with his reddened eyes

he shopped for his wife's underpants menstrual pads and burqas
how could a woman haggle with a man for such things

where the emblem of beauty is the impossibly slender
who can't be seen
the thickwaisted / the sweaty / the drunk
in short a forgettable thing
muttering to itself at dusk
between a paintpeeling cart and the roaring freeway

low tattered tents together in a herd
dust and smoke rising up into the dusky sky
a refugee woman speaks from the other side
of a veil / her lips distorting its hanging otherwise perfect opaqueness
she says she is not like American girls
who are used like tissues and thrown away

imagine the humiliation
of being inexplicably forced
to serve food to the being
you have resolutely refused to see

at the club outside town a 400 pound man
sitting on a chair by the door collects a 25 dollar cover
inside they're shaved and showing pink

on a subway crowded by strangers
I moved to sit between two women pretending I wasn't there
they furled their skirts as I approached and halted their eyes again once I sat down
they seemed to be asleep but got off when their stop was called
I can respect shame

how can you respect a woman by not seeing her
the same way you respect her by not seeing her vulva

she seemed unremarkable
she stood shaking in an icy doorway / nothing in her cup
she wasn't there was she

Unwantedness and Dependence

the master foresees / the slave works
households are formed by men
using women and slaves

affection may be an advantage
interdependence with benefits

self-reliance is a luxury

a street vendor told me
the police took his goods
left a receipt
he declined to die
he put on a good show
by not falling off yet

Adam Smith said
*all are often supplied
and a workman even of the lowest and poorest order
if he is frugal and industrious
may enjoy a greater share of the necessities and conveniences of life
than is possible for any savage
to acquire*

unless you're used up
*a carpenter in London
is not supposed to last in his utmost vigour
above eight years*

the tightrope wins by default
in the ninth

my father lived in a community
that suddenly had no use for him
he picked apples
we ate our livestock / sold land

two men cooking
outside their crates / discussing hope
I'm waiting for my death the old one said
the young one laughed a brassy laugh
what if they force you away
I'll make another / pointing to his boxhouse

unwantedness may be too much word