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*A Suite of Dances*

SAMPLER

Shearsman Books

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# I: Ghost Dance

Of the standard figures  
a thing of beauty.

An index to secrets.

Her own velocity makes the wind.

When I was a boy I'd run  
to shining seas  
and back again.

The multiple displacements.

What do you say to cosmetic innocence?

A shining sea.  
The felled tree melted  
into the hill's contours.

I measure height in floors, distance in blocks  
and length and depth in thumbs, fingers,  
the king's penis and the queen's vagina.

Like a beast in a cage.

And sings,  
"With fame will come  
release from pain."  
Prey to hunger  
on the big rock candy mountain.

Sin a speck, a  
feck-fish.  
It's the wolf's craving  
saves the world,  
satiety that ends it.

After three days rose,  
the scent impeccable.

I ordered sin, and the flesh of kings  
committed fish in the reign of surf 'n' turf.

When the dance of hands  
lost its elasticity.

Maybe the message is that those savages  
so loved life that death and done with  
needed an explanation.

Through no fault of their own they could own to.

viene a caballo.  
viene cabalgando.

come at a run.  
come galloping.

Into the tunnel  
cap hap tap map  
never came back.

That emptying  
become as destiny.

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## THE QUEST

So,  
the story of the folk: for  
Lo!  
they came, went,  
no end of tests and triumphs,  
food forbidden or dangerous,  
sacred embers – a continuity of fire, a continuity  
of cheese. Say cheese, and picture the tribe

amidst its heirlooms, left a name  
to be named for.

Deserts forests oceans rivers caves.

Coyote returns  
to a celebration.

Someone has painted this and called it luxury.  
Beyond, above the undulant course of the first ridge,  
high glaciers distant as the moon. Here one could imagine  
nothing to quest for.

To keep the world suspended  
to the final word, so,  
beyond gravity.

Luftmenschen.

Somewhere between garnet and pimento noir,  
flowing ad libidum, the sea in storm,  
turbid as wine.

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THE DANCE

Head to toe hones like a blade and glows  
while the knife is sharp.

A paucity of words for the character of light.

Toes pointed.  
The way her feet  
address the ground.

So, in a dark place  
varieties of darkness.

I went down to the nut-trees  
to see the new growth,  
the blossoming vines,  
and the pomegranates in flower.

Walnuts, almonds, filberts,  
“Imagine you saw  
a field  
all silver-white.”

In this light.

At this moment in this light  
and perhaps no other  
the sheen to the west on the leaves and undergrowth  
metallic, the river  
silver, the cliffs beyond  
pillowy with trees.

What I took to be water was a blue sloth.

“The noxious oil of poison ivy  
does give its leaves  
a certain chic.”

New dog, and a general  
sniffing of asses.

Invented onion rings,  
this buckaroo.

## ROADS TO CROSS

Migratory chickens  
hunt and peck their way across the landscape.

Why am I dancing, the chicken  
asks, why this  
compulsion.



Pliant pliable, sways, per  
suasion.

Sometimes extraordinary things.  
Like a reed whipped back  
and returned.  
Sprung and reset,  
quivering.

Slow rivers.  
Flat country.

The appearance of whatever's valued in the absence of intent.

The redhead dances.  
Hopscotch! to land  
en pointe one square  
to another.

The only one who knows the story.

The eternal ghost dance.  
So many creatures now to recover. Sow  
dragon's teeth, teeth of bison, skin of toad, crimson feather.

Riding the road to the hinterland, dark waterfalls,  
all manner of beast.

Terror of night in the forest.

At tideline, testing and rejecting words,  
alone among those not my kind.

Dis  
tinct.

Weary forwardred.

## ECONOMICS

Breeze ruffles the understory.  
Nothing but that bends with the wind.  
Across an expanse of seagrass  
a man my size tars a roof. He stops  
for water. We watch each other,  
me on the deck above the marsh.  
Arguments about the survival of the working class  
and what that means  
evaporate in the heat. It's simple: those who do,  
and those they do it for.

## PASTORAL

“There's a young man that I know.”  
Survival of the ballad as a dream of a simpler life.  
Selection as dumbing down:  
suspend criteria, and the daily facts  
attack as if the wagons were circled and it's all  
Indians, we like to say, so much fodder  
at a discount.

Make amends to Mother Kali.

If there's a hole  
kiss it.

A critique of pure farming.

A perfect fierceness.

Folk dance/ghost dance.

Snow White as the Virgin,  
as the higher gnome.

Top of the morning  
top of the town  
Grow gorse for the queen of heaven.

Both to and frowardness a nest of  
who? who? An owl  
come home to roost.

What follows? Itch  
too deep to scratch.  
Itchery as the eighth vice.  
Cold and wet for the fun of it.  
Want! Wait! Let her come to me!  
And thinks of himself as stalker.

They chirp they chirp  
and a man can't sleep  
sequellae  
got you by the tail.

#### SMALL ATTENTIONS

Father and daughter.  
She's in a trance, but a tug  
pulls her back from the traffic.  
Mother and son.  
She watches, poised with a napkin, as he carries  
the soup from bowl to mouth.

Rapt as prey and predator.

Sometimes the young  
are spit and snot.

“Someone put his hand in your pants girl  
you walk around so.”

He barely noticed the mole that would kill him.

Here where I speak no language  
I've taken to mouthing my words like the deaf  
as when I raise two fingers, meaning  
“two cimit,” and the girl in the red scarf of the most devout  
feels for the proper squeeze, raises her finger. “One,” she says,  
and smiles.

### TRABZON

On a gray day the Japanese girl  
poses by the seawall, the still  
sea behind her.

Think nothing.  
Remember nothing.

Tourism gives way to a sense of indifference  
that stone piled on stone will tumble.  
But surely they know this  
in a place plagued by lions  
and the ruins of gods.  
Then as now old women slept on the pavement,  
all that they own their pillow.

This grove sacred to cypress and cicada,  
fragments of ceramic and stone.  
It's not bright angel feet that worry me,  
singing to whatever deity.

The slender girl  
appears to float barefoot –  
what a sucker  
I've always been – and lives  
on air, luftweiblich. After all,  
we want to be free of gravity,  
gravitas, gravid, pregnant  
as we all are. It's a machine  
for aging, the loss

within the larger war. I pluck a fig  
from another's tree, here,  
where nobody's ever known.

After the flood it was olives,  
cured in the tide  
and carried by birds.

The passage of mind through matter.

Feeding the bear for appeasement.

Where nobody speaks her tongue,  
the aging tourist talks to flowers.

#### CAT GIRL

He's delighted that she talks to cats.  
He imagines her cat-like with small white feet  
and a weightless leap.

But cats become tiresome,  
and he shoos it away.

Cat licks its ass. Breakfast  
with a reminder of dinner.  
In the world as it's become,  
those who serve starve.

Cat plays at mouse.

Unfortunate cartilage  
that burnt the topless towers.

Over the water the singing of many voices.  
A fisherman's radio—but the chorus  
had seemed heroic.

Me, I'm singing "Walkin to New Orleans" as I enter Troy,  
here at the origin, in the great dissonance,  
the circle in the quadrature.

Like featherless chicks  
they were fed by birds.  
The bird of peace  
nonetheless edible.

Prehensile prebucal  
grabs and bites, comes forth  
like a hummingbird's tongue.

Motu perpetuo of tiles,  
a study of the distribution of weight, a space  
of serious delight. Symmetry become  
the natural order, world  
and garden. "There is a rule, then."

"Name it."

"2 cows = pig."  
An abstract finger.  
Many arguments.

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I am the lord or lords of disorder.

Hunger says the cat  
brings down the bird

Each garment a history  
for those with food and home.

Amphibians?  
Bought it.  
And mosquitoes rejoice.

"The disappearance of figure into ground a result of experience unmediated  
by inhibition –that all phenomena are equal, absent the interests peculiar  
to the moment and the observer."

“The world devoid of sentiment or choice, the actual outside ourselves,  
as best we can imagine it, become a sort of unnavigable hallucination.”  
Which is to say, if you can’t reduce it to a map you can’t walk it.

Champêtre. Champing at the bit.

Pecks its way through grass  
rich with the ooze of slugs.

I am he  
who walked  
from tree to tree,  
tore shreds of cloth  
to mark a passage.

“Where else have you found this degree of order?”

Put it behind me. Wind’s in the sail and the car  
lurches with impatience. What freedom  
compares to a tank of gas?  
Flew,  
flown.  
A liquid grace.

Soars downwards,  
wings vertical.

The good shepherd  
saves his flock,  
then shears and eats it.

As in: they say  
he gave his life for the bank.  
And here’s a watch, something to leave the grandkids,  
inscribed with our gratitude.

Whose mother  
was necessity.

Think of it as the tug of time and gravity,  
all things tending downwards or upwards.

No flies alack on Renfrew Street.

Did I hang my coat in the window as a form of ornament?

Heel and toe heel and toe.  
A life or a knife.  
As the small pebble determines the river's course.

Strive for the moment  
when the ball's  
at apogee.

Wull nobody rescue this boat,  
quotha.

The Order of Pecking  
whose shield is a rooster.

The guideposts of a landscape,  
that rise a hill,  
those trees a forest, that hedges grow  
wilderness.  
So, seaward, and hinterland,  
a hill,  
houses, water.

I tried an experiment,  
supposing that the order of things orders the life,

my god hungers for the deaths of kings,  
the grand luxe version of a girl in crinolines.



## EXEGESIS

The Gadarene swineherd  
chases his children's fortune.  
"Oy vey oy vey" he cries.

This  
that  
was thus.

Losing the path you discover snow.  
The sound of a bell.

The poem as a bell enclosing sound.

The business of monkeys.

A man and a maid in fallen leaves.

A schooled grace.  
Kindness in the form of chocolate.

Trumpets strumpets  
how the mouth mouths it.

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## II: At a Gallop

In a lower circle  
are those who sleep upright.

Because we are too menny.

Let's imagine the song of this or that  
as breath, or wind without flags.  
No one's born with a taste for bagpipes.

"Of day  
the light, of light  
de-light."

The girl wears jackboots  
but hates violence.

At the end of the story  
the various dances of nostalgia.

Tiny plash of stone across water.

Counting impulses for a lifetime.

Moved by the games of lovers.  
Impatient of time and tidiness.

Here in New York where the shadow of exile is everywhere  
an elderly man plays Chinese fiddle in the subway. Hard to know  
what the tune is meant to say.  
Probably a love-plaint,  
Probably sorrow. Old enough  
for war and famine.

In a long life  
death and men ride many horses.

He travels to see starvation in strange clothing.

On discovering fire.  
On hearing a warning of fire.  
In the grand guignol of the slaughter of animals.

Small explosions  
within the bone.

Learn logic through hand and eye. It's a matter of the texture of thought,  
things,  
timbrels,  
and what's to be known beyond resonance.

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