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A
PUNCTUATED
EQUILIBRIUM

D.R. WAGNER

Dedicated to
Gabrielle Wagner
Annalisa Wagner
John Dorsey

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Introduction

On D.R. Wagner's A Punctuated Equilibrium

As I get older I find gathering my thoughts on literature to be more difficult with each passing day. Perhaps that's why reading the words of D.R. Wagner have become one of the few simple pleasures I still cling to. His work, while complex and layered with emotion, takes me back to an earlier time, when I didn't have to see something to know it was right there in front of me.

In this age of iPhones, viral memes, and countless Kardashians, it's easy enough to forget that plain spoken language can still carry weight, and that words filled with youthful rhythm and song still have magic to share with the world.

That's what D.R.'s poetry has to offer, a restored sense of wonder. That's what his words leave me with every time I'm lucky enough to read them, to touch their skin, to be in their presence. These wonderful words that live, breathe, love and have dreams of their own

A Punctuated Equilibrium is certainly everything I expected it to be, it has all of those things. It has poetry that is steeped in nature, both human and otherwise, a sense of reality that borders on the mystical at times, a sense of magic, and more than a few dark moments that wonder into all of our brains in the middle of night, if we let them in door.

This collection offers something for everyone, the optimist, the pessimist, the dreamer, the realist, those who love poetry, those who are just passing through the night, looking to warm themselves by the fire of intellect before returning to the latest reality tv show or the echoing sound bytes of the nightly news.

The title sticks with me, A Punctuated Equilibrium. I've given it a lot of thought, and I think it's all about trying to find the perfect balance of words, or perhaps knowing D.R. as I do, trying to use words to find a workable mental balance in our day to day lives. D.R. wouldn't be the first poet to walk this tightrope, he just does it with more grace than most.

I find grace in his silence as much as his song, which is a rare thing in this world, like any precious gem should be. I hesitate to call D.R. a lyric poet or any particular kind of poet at all, his language is before words, it's of the Earth, it's in the sky, easy to observe, hard to catch, and harder still to hold on to. I guess I'm just saying, reach out your hand, open your mind, hold on tight and gather a few stars in your

pocket as you read these poems, you'll find your balance, and D.R. will be right there with you, he's been there the whole time.

-John Dorsey 1/20/16



Untitled needlework, cotton on cotton canvas

THE FOLDING SCREEN

The rider locked on the carousel.
The inability to show motion
While the whole of the day
Remains overcast and gray.

Night not so much coming,
As it is attached to the moments
With an adhesive tape
Not found in the imagination at all.

The voices come together like parenthesis
Gathered into a bag along with peppers,
Cauliflower, containers of tofu,
Cat food and paper products
Separated from each other
In yet smaller bags, chapters
Of a novel, the folds are screens
Set up to divide a room
Or perform a service that proclaims
The imagination while showing us
Images of the old Battersea Bridge,
Architectural drawings, collections
Of West Indian bird skins and hundreds
Of picture postcards decoupage
To pretend a language of exploration.

We find ourselves opening and closing
Our mouths, obstructing what
Might be seen clearly
As a collection of jars and wheelbarrows,
West-running brooks and songs
Of the self. Changes of melody
Attaching themselves to any object
They may choose, hoping the song
Will still be understood

A MILLION SILENCES

From the window we could see
The wind skitter across the yard,
Over the pond, intent on making
A Winter of itself before it lost
What it knew of the world,
Becoming a glass the spirit
Could only move across.

Never a majesty again, only a part
Fitted like a lilac or forsythia,
A long and twisting smoke.

Could it be that silences are fitted
To our cells as the seasons are
To our souls?

We are not without feeling.
We are object only to the idea of silences
This was the setting when silence
Became the chords, Where it is
Always late and all is going to sleep.

The light comes from within that sea
Where silence is permanent.
We recognize those silences,
Thousands of them, millions of them.
They shall never be stronger
Than they are now. We feel
Their nobility as they flood
Into the sea of our imagination.

They will become water again.
The window will remain glass.
The Winter will still delight
In showing us its teeth.

From the edges of the room
Silence covers us once again.
It becomes deep as if we were
Finally without our breath
And covered with earth.

LIVE: ACOUSTIC

I am caught in the darkness
Near light but still unable to see
Where it is I am. The blur of night
Stumbling close by my footsteps.

If I put my hand on the wall, I know
I am near light but there is no light.
The illuminated globe of the world glows
Just beyond the door, should there be a door
And, of course, we always hope for a door.

*

I saw you standing at the back of the room.
We had just finished playing the song about
The dawn during the snowstorm and how
The sun had moved through the falling snow.
Everything became a kind of gold that we did not
Know how to describe, so we made the music
Within it. There was one bird, he had a damaged
Wing and flew in circles around us making a wonderful
Sound. The lyrics were based on those circles.

I found my hands upon your shoulders.
I thought I was still in the music. Golden
Lights flew along the edges of my vision
Inside my eyes, yet still high above it.

*

I walked all the way to the end of the road
Where the waterfall began. It was nearly
Twilight and the waterfall was a lilac and hyacinth,
The color of heartbreak or someone you love
Walking away and you knowing you will not
Be seeing them again. I suppose there is
A music there but it is stolen by cellos and keyboards.
Given to a corner where we notice the quality
Of the light, the people crossing the room,
The way their conversation had its own agenda
And there we were, together once again, waiting
As we are now. I lean close. Listening to your breathing.

THE THRONE CONCEALED

You may find yourself
At the side of the road
Trying to explain how you got there.

You may find yourself, gun in hand,
Creeping between cars to keep
From being noticed by a pursuer.

You may find yourself caught by the arm
During a dream, only to wake
Up with blood on your sheets,
Your eyes swollen shut.

Let these dreams go by.
Let them remain as such.
Do not fear the glowing, pulsing
Light in the forest or the strange
Singing that comes forth from
The darkness surrounding you.

You are the high thing. You are where
The singing comes from on this white
Night. Do not fear the journey. We all go.
You are in service to that which shines.
No one can touch you. You are the shape
Of heaven blinding even the angels in your
Miraculous dreaming. You may find yourself
Saying that you love someone and push
Another round into the chamber, fondling
Peace as if it were the child of God.

SOME FAIRIES

The fairy of the heart.
The fairy of memories.
The fairy of autumn nights.
The fairy of the end of childhood.
The fairy guarding the feet of travelers.
The fairy who can speak the spells of olden times.
The fairy who can know when love is true.
The fairy of the evening summer grass.
The fairy of the fireflies.
The fairy of secret places.
The fairy who is seen but once.
The fairy who watches sleep descend.
The fairy of the Spring dances.
The fairy of long friendships.
The fairy who chases loneliness.
The fairy who appoints the stars.
The fairy who reveals what was hidden.
The fairy who can see lost things.
The fairy who protects the smallest breezes.
The frost fairy.
The fairy of winter windows.
The fairy who protects enchantment.
The fairy of distant music.
The fairy at the doors of dreaming.
The fairy called "delight of the newborn."
The fairy who attends the songbirds.
The fairy who can weave with music.
The fairy of the garments of the seasons.
The fairy lit by moonlight alone.
The fairy of the storm.
The fairy from the bows of ships.
The fairy of the starlit meadows.
The fairy of the grace in language.

VISION TRADER

Before the shadows got too soft
There was a man who traded
In visions. He was a surgeon
Of sorts who barely left a mark
When he excised a perfect golden
Octopus that could sing ancient
Greek boating songs or slice
A Valentine of brightly colored
Birds into a strange collection
Of coins much desired by the
Herdsman of the upper terrace.

He worked from dusk until dark
During the long Summer days
And during storms of any kind.
His voice was very musical.
Cats would be charmed by his
Soft whistles and his conjuring
Of small winged animals seen
Nowhere else in any moment.

He disappeared into the throat of
Spring when the child weavers
From the dark villages were
Bargaining with him over the souls
Horses had left with them. That
And the lovely skins of animals
Found by the children at the bottom
Of the cliffs near the great waterfalls.

There are those who claim to know
Where he has gone, but whenever
A particular wash of golden light
Passes through this place, one
Can hear his tinkling laugh and
For a moment be unable to think.
Smoke rises from the ends of our
Fingers. We are able to dazzle you
With words, the color of which
Is able to hook into our imagination
So completely we forget we have

The power of speech and find
Ourselves lost in the pure magic
Only seen in the best twilight markets.

PORCELAIN

The Yuan Dynasty blue and white
Dishes both feature a stylized fish, fins erect,
Mouth open, surrounded by beautifully
Figured aquatic, decorative motifs. The plate from
Sometime in the 14th century as is the Wine
Jar with similar decoration. They echoed a dream
Of the veranda with its coolness in late afternoon,
The memory of the clay was long and perfect.

The magicians had crested an almost unreal
Time in the depth of the glazes, mirrored
Stories full of changing figurations, horses
Ridden to the edge of the pools in the pavilions.
The great fish rising from the waters to speak
From prophecy and a promise of endless
Evenings to be enjoyed by those whose sword
Was sharpest, commanding all that could be
Made beautiful to be made for themselves,
For their single delight. All of this time wrapped
Deep inside a dynasty alive now only in the scholar's
Memory. Days of the Khan, all dust blowing
Through a labyrinth made of objects.

The blood has long ago dried and decayed.
Only these vessels remain, their fishy presence
Porcelain mirrors, trinkets belonging to time,
Who rules kingdom after kingdom of ghosts.

WHITE

We were talking about how happy
The new snow made us feel.
That whiteness on white and the world
White as well. No wind and the light,
The magic light that made all things
Possible.

When we lived in Kenmore, New
York, the Winter had to line
Up across the lake in Canada
And march down the winds
To do its lovely trick.

Out here in California, the lens
Tends to cloud over like a windshield
On a car driving in the mud,
Rain and dust. Two curved
Views of the world never quite
In agreement with each other,
As we drive through whatever
Season it declares itself to be.

We will gather all we can of white,
In sugar, teeth, cake icing,
Clean paper, plastic forks and try
To tell others about this loveliness.

Only the babies will understand
What we have to say. But
We will say it anyway.

Sometimes the pain screams
Such a brilliant white light across
Our brains we forget everything
We were going to do or say.
So much for that sway snow
Had for carrying us away. Quietly.

BEYOND THE COMPASS

I was stroking her back while she slept.
She is like a compass an ancient device
That shows direction Not as seasons show
Direction. A compass has no agenda.
It is not a map and does not show the weather,
Only a direction. Perhaps the deities follow
The compass finger, never counting anything
Except a specific direction to open a journey.

But let me speak of Summer for a moment.
I was stroking her back while she slept.
There are contours to the season even
When her face is turned away from the light
As she sleeps. I can call angels to my fingertips.
There are kingdoms in the bones of her back.
I have found temples there in which one may
Approach sleep, knowing the night has our breathing
And gathers the late evenings of Summer,
A respite from the grasping one does
In the mouth of Winter. Everything becomes
Secret as I push against the muscles of her back
And yes, she continues to sleep and I build
Columns, pylons, the silence of centuries
Long past, barely able to find themselves
Still alive, still moving in our own brief window.

I will have magic of all this caressing, of this
Lovely vessel for the dreaming that is not death
But another eternity, mirror resting upon mirror,
Converting that which may never be remembered
With the delicate breezes destiny provides
For strangers such as ourselves. One sleeping,
House by house in the smooth hours of the night,
One stroking the dreamer as she sleeps,
Vertiginous in being able to touch such an eternity.

THE END OF THIS UNIVERSE

A murmur of birds.
They are taking down the stars one by one.
Like coins they tumble into the lake, forgotten,
Unforgotten. Unburdening themselves
From an incalculable mythology.

Erasing symbols, nurturing and needless
As sirens are to nightingales,
As drunk is to the moon.

I wait by the water. Little by little
I begin to no longer recognize myself,
Except as tigers and tigers and tigers
Searching the streets where forever has been lost
Irreparably. Things become transparent.
People slip away or escape
Deep into the waters of the bay.

They have forgotten their form.
They have forgotten what sparse language they owned.
They have forgotten the weight of consciousness,
The unrelenting memory, the petite charm of the garden ,
The mirrored pool below the fountain,
So secret and necessary.

The flowers, silent now. The stars beneath the water,
Wavering, now vermilion, now yellow.
I recall the vague dreams of children,
Sights along the road.

I decide this must be a journey.
I dive into the water to be with the stars.
I will wash this dust from me
And begin another universe.

A HANDFUL OF LIGHTS

I had a small handful of lights.
They were to used to transport
Me into any space but I was never
Okay with that condition.

I was sitting in a small room with a single lamp.
There were a lot a rabbits on the floor of the room.
Outside I could hear people coughing. The noise was
Much like one would hear in a theater before the show
Was to begin. The room appeared not to have a door.

A rhythmic pulse begins. I find it more difficult than ever
To begin. I begin to imagine the smell.
I look hard at the palm of my hand.
One wall of the room begins to dissolve.
I am before a host of angels.

The rabbits moved to the edges the room.
There is a red weeping before them.
The Angels appeared to be drunk.
Some of them are smoking.
They began to sing that blue chalk song of theirs.

Animals emerge from the palm of my hand,
Snakes, elephants, dogs, lemurs,
A flock of red birds. My hand becomes
Detached. I realize these lights,
These animals are a kind of language.

I will attempt to use this language.
The Angels form a circle and begin to move
Around and around me. Perhaps something
Here will prompt you to construct a secret life,
One that is full of things like these.

Come closer. These are terrible and majestic
Beliefs I am asking of you. You'll need a boat.
Remember what I told you. Travel alone.

BASILISK

I have the sole treasure.
It is greater than solitude.
It is pierced with music.
It has nothing to do with the moon.
It exalts as only the soul can exalt.
It magnifies both the twilight and the dawn.
It has a memory greater than that of trees.
It is more welcome than water to the thirsty.
It is as vain as death and commands all its courtesies.

I offer it to you as Abraham would offer it.
It is the book and the reader of the book.
It is the blind directing us to the light.
It does not recognize dreams as dreams.
It does not recognize you as yourself
But embraces you nevertheless.

It strokes the skin of pleasure,
Believing it is saving the world.
But does so without justification.
It returns to us as day and night returns.
It opens a library of endless streets.

It marries the sea to decipher it.
And holds vigil before all mirrors.
It wearies of eternity and waits
At other crossroads weaving beyond language.
It becomes lost irreparably, spilling from our hands
As fire and salt, as all who have loved us.

IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE

There were hundreds of people on the bridge.
This wasn't something we could prepare for.

I felt I couldn't get back, that the road was broken,
Part of the sky caught in a double long spring trap
And I was traveling that sky, careening back and forth
Between wisdom and insanity, afraid to say
What I meant, afraid of sounding stupid,
Filling a vacancy in my soul that made noise
Like a tornado. I was a debris field.

This is no way to make a poem.
This is no way to understand emotion.
This is barely a way to communicate.
I have taken leave of all events.
Nothing is conclusive anymore.
I can only perform specific acts such as these.

I walk through the garden and admire
The balustrades, the vicissitudes of the labyrinth.
I will haunt the memories of others
Without their suspecting it.

I try to Imagine myself as the wheel, the rose.
I believe I can hear souls departing,
Things of no importance, objects from the pockets
Of time that have deserted all but the most ancient
Of histories. My voice is heaped upon
These things which do not have a name.

I stir in my dream
Believing I have influenced
Every clock. I desert myself
And watch from a red hill.

A PUNCTUATED EQUILIBRIUM

She would hold hands with shadows,
Lead them away from the light,
Gently lift them from beneath
The bodies of the dead and gather
Them in, absorbing them into her own
Body as a spider does its silk as it climbs
Toward prey struggling in its web.

The waterfall dusted with snow,
Ice flowing over its brink, a million
Shapes of it, filling the lower river,
Pressing against its banks and forming
A great ice bridge, sometimes over one hundred
Feet thick. The river still flowing beneath the ice.

“It is the river thinking.”, said Ramon.
“Water does not think.”, I replied.
“Ah but it does.”, he said. “Are we not
Mostly water ourselves? Even as we find our tongues,
Rivers are so much greater than ourselves,
As are oceans. Look at the great thoughts
Of the Antarctic and the curve of the polar ice,
Still ice, but in the blaze of each day without
Shadows. Think of its storms, all frozen water.”

We have watched her on the battlefields,
Standing amidst patrols in the dusk, leaning
On the shadows of the soldiers, tugging
At them, slipping them away as death
Comes in its many-colored vehicles,
Hurrying across the deserts, picking
Men and women like flowers one after another.

What do they need with shadows here?
The water of their lovely bodies sucked back
Into the desert, becoming thorny plants
Fed by what used to be the dreams of water.

We stand at the edge of the maelstrom,
Gazing at the rising bridge of ice.
The river, never stopping, the waves
The ocean uses, never stopping,

The bodies falling one after another,
As endless as wars are endless.
She rides her grayest of vehicles
Over the grayest of lands, filling it
With shadow after shadow,
Stitching them together into the most
Terrible of songs, creating a punctuated equilibrium
In an event designed as extinction,
Fed, as all things, by the thoughts of water.

17 BLACK SWANS

for Kathy Keith

1. We found the bones
In a perfect circle.
Each had been painted black
With red ends. In the center,
A small pile of bright red sand.
2. Sometimes in the morning
The mist rising toward dawn,
The lake looked choreographed
With great black shapes floating
In the air.
3. They began to disappear
For no apparent reason.
It is said they can tell
Where the wet will last the longest.
4. Kathy called them 'The Stations
Of The Cross.' "But there are
Only fourteen stations.", someone
Said. "Yes, I know.", she answered.
5. They look like prayers floating
With their wings held fluffed and high.
Prayers sealed with red wax.
6. When I remember the Autumn
I was in the kitchen looking
Out the window at the lake.
The sun was going down
Across the red and gold trees.
Black swans. exactly seventeen of them.
7. The heart abandons
The shadows for the sun.
Swans coming into the sunlight
Trying to surprise it as they did.

8. I dragged a chair down
To the lake of an afternoon and sat
Reading William Butler Yeats.
When I looked up, all of the swans
Had gathered close to where I was.
They made no sound as if waiting for something.

9. During a thunderstorm one Summer
Day, a lightening strike very near to me
Made them seem bright red
With black beaks
For half a breath, inhaling.

10. When I asked how dark
It was outside, you said,
“As dark as the black swans.”

11. “Do you have any idea
Why there are fewer and fewer
Each year?”, I ask.
“They know about places we don’t.”

12. I showed my daughter
The constellation Cygnus, the Swan.
“Except for the stars it is a black swan.”,
She said.

13. I had a dream I was going
To see a famous wizard.
I was traveling in a small
Chariot-like vehicle, bright red.
It was being pulled across the sky
By seventeen black swans.

14. The day totally blank
And just before sunset
Seventeen black swans
Landing on the lake.

15. I had just pulled into the drive
And could see the lake clearly.
The swans made a perfect line,
One behind the other.

16. "Cobs and pens. That's what they
Are properly called"; she said.
"Pens?, like what I write with?, I asked.
"Yes, exactly. what else would they be?"

17. Black swans in the snow on the edge
Of the lake. Their red beaks.

VIEWING THE DELUGE

The moon unnoticed.
I am afraid.
The corpse of love
Hangs from the heart
Too far to be seen from here.

I don't want to look at it.
I prefer the moon, but tonight
It is gray and does not hang
About the earth for any reason.

I am walking the streets
Smelling of the jails as if
They were twisted dancers
Brought to entertain us.

My hands are infected.
I can no longer touch anything
Without pain in my fingertips.

I once had lights so sweet
You could see bodies floating on them
Just waiting to be had as the
Palest of lovers. But no more.
Only a storm of snow, of night

THE SHAPE OF THE COIN IN ITS HISTORY

She said: "There wasn't supposed to be a room here."
And he agreed, opening the door onto rows of houses
In streets of every color, pouring what remained of the memories
The dead could no longer access, into the roadways where
Great animals and hungry ghosts flocked to find what they thought
They were looking for. Every house faced away from the world.

He said: "I am an eyeball rolling away from a body, blue then mud.
Blue then mud over and over, into a lake of fire fueled with unused
Words, forests of them, given to those seasons we had to discard
When we were required to have only four." And someone imagines
They are the words to a song and begins to sing them. There are
Deafening explosions every time a mouth is opened. "See the hills
Are still green." A four inch hose full of a pink substance begins
To spray over everything until all loses form and begins bubbling.

She said: "Redeem us." But here were too many children who
Had no idea what she was talking about and began picking at
Her clothing until it was gone and her red skin hissed and bubbled.
Entire populations relocated, hoping for a better weather.

He said: "The clocks have squandered everything. There is no
Botany left." We tried again and again to return him to a waking state.
He looked up at us and we could see him in the dream. He was drowning
But still using as many bullets as he could command to rid himself
Of his fore bearers, as if they were corridors in a fragile palace.
Full of images, all for sale and warlike to the touch, as sentence
Diagrams fight against their respective places gazing longingly
At adjectives used for mausoleums, full of ancient faces,
Full upon the sea, gobbling their adventures without a tear.

She said: "We cannot continue this way.", and exiled herself
With some forgotten king who only existed in a bit of Antic
Muse, unable to decide if she were happy or not happy.
She listened to the conversations of women walking the plains,
Smelling of good food and constant mornings as if they had
Never known anything else. She became unable to perceive dusk.

What we shall not know is their blindness five hundred years
From now, lifting from the garden, no longer children and barely
Glimpsed by anyone who could narrate more than the principles
Of madness, its firmaments and angels so intimate and musical
No one is able to notice them. A hand holding a fine and fragile globe.

SAND FOR KINGS

They do not allow us to come close
To these places any longer. There are demons,
Madmen with flaming mouths and an ability
To hover in the air and emulate great sadness
When nothing is at all wrong. Sand for kings.

Hands clouding the mind in a effort to keep
Things happening one after another. The
Card games are in the other room where
The young men trade their stories of bold
Adventures...walking to a corner unscathed,
swimming across the river without getting burns
Over the body, finding partners who are not too
Infected. They are way beyond any kind of weapon.

They play at cards, sandbag the windows against
Any light being seen from the street. One can
detect them by the clouds of buzzing insects
That cover the doorways to these hells.

They will not recognize us any longer if we speak
To them. Everything belongs to the kings. We
Are bound to want something they figure.
Better to strangle the son of a bitch than ask
Him for water. Their eyes burn white and hollow.

We still can find the forests, but not much of them.
A few of us have seen live animals and Ramon
Keeps a cat in his room just off the coast.
We have no need to see these so-called cities
Any longer. I make sure the knife blades are sharp,
Carry a couple with me at all times, speak to no one.

JUST BEFORE BEDTIME.

Sleep has come for me quickly tonight.
It has not given me time to speak my name.
It knows that it isn't important. It has dreams.
There are many this evening, part of its urgency.

They are no good to the dead. They are no good
To those who have no bodies. Sleep has gathered
Them. They do not last even as long as strawberries.
At least it has waited for the darkness and for the night
To be cool around the house. I open the window
To let them in. I will be asleep before I can see what
Sleep has brought. Sleep tells me I am a wind across
A plain, that I am remembered on the steppes of the North,
That tonight I will not need any language. That is all
I am able to remember before the tongues clack loudly
And the colored songs begin to snap in my ears.

THE FAULT OF THE WORDS

Strings dance in the air. There is a blur
In the heart. It is as if the night had a skull
And eyes to see approaching ships.

A book of engravings, lost in a room,
In a great house. It carries on conversations
With the dead. We become witnesses
Without knowing why anything other
Than dreams would have such a language
Attached to it. We resolve to make dust of it.

Still, I will stop to listen to a few more birds
Caught here in this universe where strings
Twist and interlace, seemingly without purpose.
I will consider all enigma, all wandering spirits,
Without purpose except to put us on the very edge
Of some mythology that prompts us to speak
In hells such as this, looking for an intricate
fire, left to be used by nightingales.

This will be an exultation of memory,
The fault of words not used previously
By the dark, never heard by Keats, a liquid
Song, straining to be heard, then a breeze,
Then, strain as we may, nothing.

A BIT OF THE ENCHANTMENT MIND YOU

This was the path of the enchantment.
The dark blue-black tricks of the night
Lifted by their skirts to dizzying heights.

The ability to know the waves, to call them
By name and have them bear our bodies high
Upon their crests into the great storms, fly.

To hold the fairy light within the hands like this.
To see the glow and cast it out upon the world
Where few would ever see or even know.

The naming of the mythic beings and kings.
The places where they ruled soft upon the tongue,
Spoken to the firelight, built on harps, then sung.

The casting of enchantments spells.
Thought foolish things by nearly everyone
But not by you or me, what can barely be undone.

LIGHTS IN THE DARK

The whole house was a room.
It had walls but there were never doors.
Someone was singing in Gaelic
Dan Nar Narbh with a dry stringed instrument
Walking behind the lyric helping the words
To mean. I could see people moving inside
The place through the windows. The glass
Looked like skin that had just begun to grow
Back after a terrible injury to the body, not quite
Transparent, but enough so that one could see
The blood moving just below the surface.

Lights in the dark. When she spoke she
Sounded like the Twelfth century. no one
Spoke like that today. It sounded like
Clay and handfuls of salt except for the lament
And the Alleluia she repeated every so often.
Others mumbled it under their breath.
They were armed with decorated knives.

We had a request when we came here.
The women understood perfectly our need
For paper but the men feared we might
Bring spirits down if we made any marks
On the stuff. They would not meet our eyes.

We placed ladders straight up in an open
Field and began to climb them. The ones
Who reached the top disappeared from view
Completely. They asked if we were angels.
We were not. We explained we spoke
Using clouds and could make *Duan Chroi losi*,
A little song to the heart. They understood the Gaelic.

We began to ring the hand and finger bells.
The birds came to the edge of the clearing
To listen to us. The house seemed to pulse
As if it were a place one could actually live in.

We waited until it was all dark around us.
Then we rained. slowly at first but finally
A long cold downpour that lasted for days.
By the time the sun returned we had left
That country. It is said we can be found
In particular tales that have nothing to do
With our purpose. None have been translated
From the Gaelic, but they are often sung.

A CHANGING OF THE GUARD

Your heart in all its splendor.
Your soul magnifies the perfection
Given to it by the children of the angels.

Mayhem departing by train,
Bound for fire in the high mountains
Where few know its name, can identify
The curious clothing it wears on its way
To destruction, a dissolution of purgatory.

What do we eat that calls John of the Cross
Through time atop Mount Carmel? What allows
Us to speak in all these tongues and still be
Understood completely and then not at all.

A wild lament, the friction of the moon across
The starry sky assembled for the touch of your
Hand, your heart without boundaries beating
Out the spinning of the planets. A song that
Is the dawn and day and evening and then night.

Oh my love, I look into your eyes and I no longer
Know the vale of bitter tears that is this earth.
I draw my sword and spin before the gates
Of your dear heart. None shall defile such
A place as this. No evil comes to us.
I am the guard.

WHITE SWANS

We have swans. It is soon
After midnight. They are restless,
Rustling their huge white wings
In the moonlight. The stars are doing
Things we do not expect like pebbles
Blowing against a bell.

Fireflies trail in the sky, They spill
Across the night like noise but
Do not carry sound for their dances.
We can barely see the mountains.
We decide to build our own fire.

The swans begin making patterns
In their swimming... I begin to hope
For rain. You said you would return
During the rains It has been much too
Long. A sadness sits on the edge
Of the pool where the swans keep
Their secrets. The city lights bounce
In the waters reflection. There are
Rock shadows across my hands.
I can pick tears from my cheeks.

I will tell myself this is some kind
Of photograph, a mouth that can
No longer speak like the farewells
The tempest allows us as it passes
Through our bloodstream attracting
Flock after flock of these white swans.

IN THE MINES

I don't think about the mines much
Anymore. I'd rather think of trees,
So I do. I can keep trees in my mind
And they are quite beautiful.

There are no headlamps, no carbide
Lights. There is never the sound of
Tracks somewhere in the dark.
Tracks make sounds even when nothing
Is using them. It is a gray sound
And a serious one, so possessed.

But the trees are like gods.
They rise up and sway in the wind.
I sit for hours looking at them.
Sometimes they creak like mine
Timbers creak, but they bend
And sway and fill my heart with
A special light, a different sound.

Even at night the trees are so high.
I am not sitting in the water,
The drip, and the dark. The boss
Saying not to breathe too deeply
Because we are running out of air.
And the stillness moving on the tracks
And the disappeared trees of the men.

And the trees. I listen for the trees.
They begin speaking to me. I begin to weep.

THE SOUND OF RAIN HEARD LONG AGO

'You have too many eyes.'
I touched her sleeve.
I could feel her arm beneath
The cloth. It was waiting for something.

'Don't turn the alarum off
When it starts. It will be
Hours before I hear it.
I have to come a long way back.
We have different vehicles there.'

Someone was taking the skin
Off a story that had not
Been told in a long time.
No one was going to believe
It this time. Too many
People were still alive
Who could remember
Those years and the children
running inside of them.

She didn't look back when
She heard the alarum.
She kept her arms tight
To the sides of her body.

HARLEM NOCTURNE

For Robert Lee Haycock

I was flipping across the radio dial.
The room was dark except for the light
Illuminating the dial of the old thing.
If you looked in the back past the Masonite
Back you could see the tubes glowing.

There was an unsettling music playing
That sounded like it does when you're are trying
To write something very specific and your mind
Will have none of it. It wants its own way.

I remember it was very much night, a thick
Night, thick as a plush black carpet and as soft.
The place made its own walls. I could see the cats
Trying to find a way across the room to the radio.

The broken sound was the past. One could
Hear it when one shook the radio. It was in
There, but it had been damaged just after
World War II. It made a sound like it needed
Its timing adjusted. Soft violet and yellow
Flames hovered at the ends of the tailpipes.

"I don't know how to get out of this place.",
I told Ramon. "Just drive.", he said
"The road will be in the headlights.
We can make the coast by morning.
No one will find us. We can have
Bacon and eggs before the past
Even gets there." He made me laugh.

"And turn that radio up a bit. Sometimes
They play really old songs this late."

"Yeah, like Night Train or Harlem Nocturne."
I said listening as hard as I was able.
"Yeah, he said, "like Night Train and Harlem Nocturne."

THE LONELINESS OF BIRDS

They knew angels by their names.
They were heralds for them, carrying
Banners and strings of lights that became the stars.

They were the lovers of the trees.
Their feathers are soft for this reason.
Their songs were known by all of the land.

In the Fall, the angel began turning
All ways before the gates of Eden.
Dreams no longer had birds.

Their music became notes spun in the throat,
The screaming of hawks, the iterations of starlings,
The lexicons of cuckoos, all troubling the seasons.

These birds fly above our heads, are afraid
When we move toward them, squawk and gesticulate
When we try to call them to ourselves.

We are not salvation for them. The clouds
Are princes of the atmosphere, the rain
Heralds of earth's breathing.

Birds watch now with cool eyes.
They speak only to their kind.
They remember always that which has been lost.

GATE

What is the brightest star of all tonight?
My hands have turned an electric blue .
They pulse like a room full of children
Learning something interesting about
How light gets inside of things.
We show them the photographs we
Have made of the soul.

They tell us they look like the Grand Canyon,
Niagara Falls, Mount Everest, Elmo,
A great dragon and a lovely walk along
A river that is made of something
Good to drink.
We do not have eyes like this any longer.

The windows explode before a shower
Of automated gun fire. Two of the shots
Shatter a painting of a man fishing
Bosch-like in an asshole. We have no
Idea how we got here. I offer you
A few lines of what was to be a lovely
Poem and we get the shit shot out of us
Before we can misuse a preposition.

Someone has sent for dogs, Real dogs.
They will arrive just after we reach the gate
At the end of this thing and get back outside
To see what it is the stars are doing now.
Close your eyes. Make another painting,
Something good to drink. Gate.

THE BACKS OF DREAMS

What hangs like the hanged
Man just before me,
As I scramble for stones,
Blood, moon, amethyst, ruby?

I stood upon the backs
Of whomever was there
And they knew me
But they thought I was other.

When I wake, I will walk
Through the small door
To find myself near the fire,
Wrapped in a many colored blanket,
Speaking this way, thinking
You will understand me.

No, you may as well understand
The rain, yet I shall be your tongue.

THE CLOTHING OF THE SOULS

It was Ramon who told me the lights had come
Out of the forest. I did not believe him. The lights
Never came out of the forest. Most people didn't
Even know they were there in the first place.

Are you sure? I asked him but I knew he was
Telling the truth. He never said anything
That wasn't true.

We had seen the lights in the forest when
We were teenagers. Far past Mullandy's
Old farm, out where there weren't trails
Any longer, where we knew the larger
Animals lived, we had first seen them.
There was a crystal quality about them.

They refracted light and often seemed
To hover about four feet off the ground.
They were usually seen in dense groups.
They moved quickly and seemed to sense
When someone was looking at them.

It was impossible to follow them.
They moved in the night air as through
A labyrinth, twisting, forming colored
Chains of light that flitted and dodged
Before one. It was like we were not
Supposed to see them ever.

Twice we had seen them make swirling
Circles and we knew we had heard a music
Coming from them but not truly from them, from our
Heads, which filled with this music when they swirled.

We had watched them for years but never learned
Much about them. We knew they could change
Colors at will and that they had some kind of communication
About them. They never came closer than the meadows
And even then it was rare for them to do so,

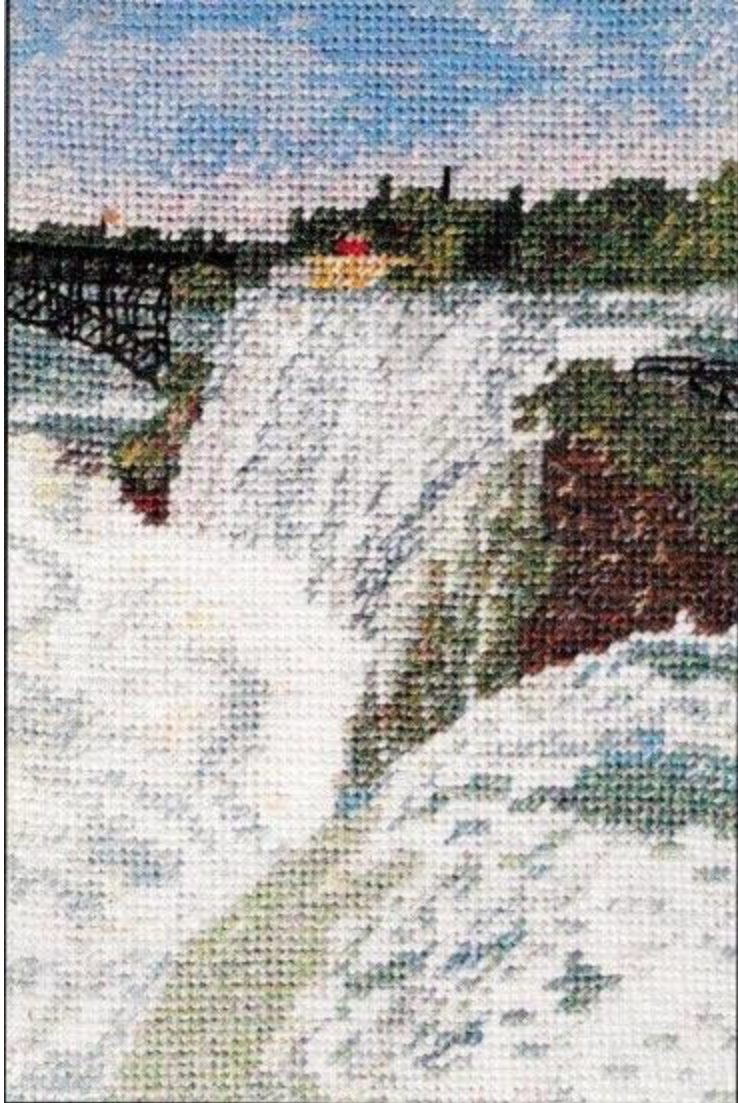
Now they were in the streets of our town
Like exclamations about the shapes night
Could take. They would surround certain
People and swirl around them slowly at first,
Then with a ferocity that should have frightened
The people but apparently they could not see
These lights. They were our domain only.

This continued for about three weeks,
Well toward the full moon. We noticed
The larger animals had come closer
To the town as well. Then just as suddenly
As it had started, it stopped.

We have been gifted by some great power.,
Ramon said. Now when we look at others
We can see the clothing of their souls.
We can see how their souls are moving
In this universe. All that coming and going
Is only the language of the stars. Wear
Your soul as if it were a bracelet made of diadems.
Give it to all you meet on this crazy planet.
This light will appear to us as what we call
The stars. We will recognize others who
Can see this way. They will name the stars.
We will be able to pronounce these names for them.



Untitled needlework, cotton on cotton canvas



Untitled needlework, cotton on cotton canvas



D.R. Wagner

Post Scriptum

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D.R. Wagner is the author of over thirty books and chapbooks or poetry and letters. He founded press : today : niagara in Niagara Falls, NY in 1965 and later Runcible Spoon (press) in the late 1960's and produced over fifty magazines and chapbooks.

He co-wrote *The Egyptian Stroboscope* with d.a. levy in the late 1960's. He read with Jim Morrison of the Doors in a legendary reading with Morrison and Michael McClure.

He has read with Lawrence Ferlinghetti, Al Winans, Viola Weinberg, d.a. levy, E.R. Baxter III, Ed Sanders, Ann Waldman and many, many other poets over the past 40 years. His work is much published and has appeared in numerous translations. He has exhibited visual poetry with the likes of William Burroughs, Byron Gysin, Ian Hamilton Finlay, bp Nichol, bill bissett, J.F. Bory, John Furnival in venues ranging from The Musee de Arts Decoratifs, Paris, at the Louvre to the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C.

He is also a visual artist, producing miniature needle-made tapestries that have been exhibited internationally and are included in numerous publications and museum collections. He is, further, a professional musician, working as a singer-songwriter and playing guitar and keyboards. He has taught Design at the University of California at Davis since 1988. He currently lives in Locke, Ca the cultural center of the Sacramento River Delta.

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