

# *Yggdrasil*

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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,

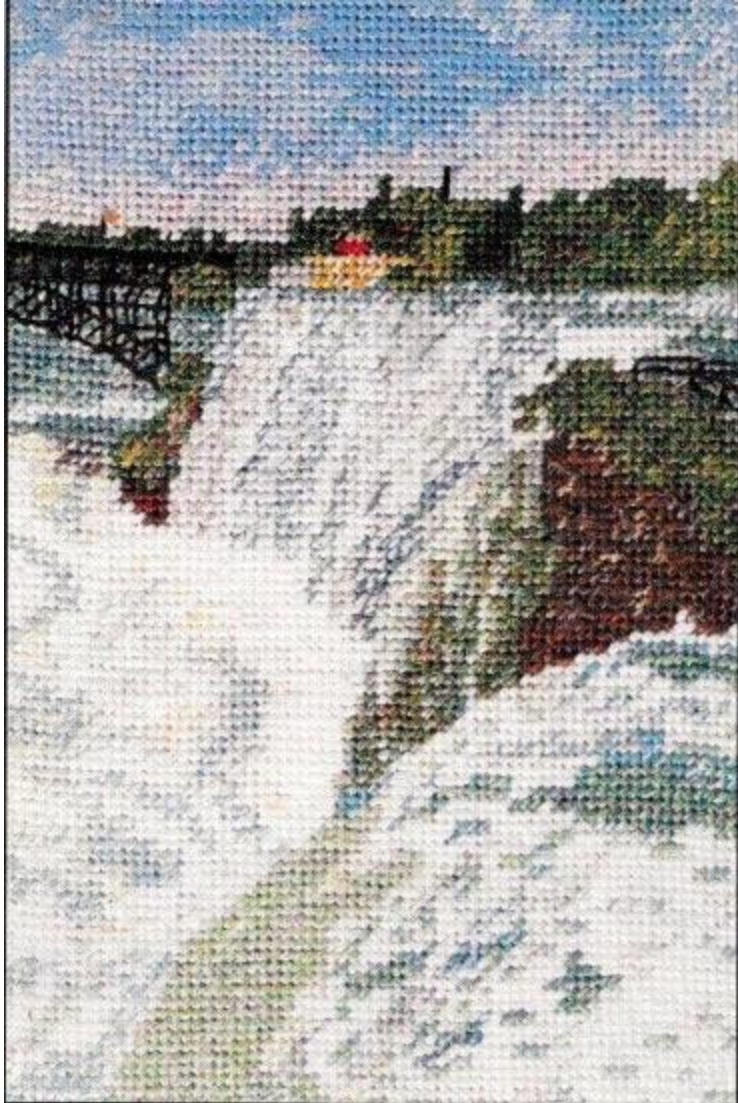
Now they were in the streets of our town  
Like exclamations about the shapes night  
Could take. They would surround certain  
People and swirl around them slowly at first,  
Then with a ferocity that should have frightened  
The people but apparently they could not see  
These lights. They were our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