

LIKE OYSTERS OBSERVING THE SUN
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Black
Lawrence
Press

for my grandfather & first renegade teacher of literature, Robert Edward Toohey
(1921–2005)

*. . .we are too much like oysters observing the sun through
the water, and thinking that thick water the thinnest of air.*
—Ishmael, Moby Dick

*“O Oysters, come and walk with us!”
The Walrus did beseech.
“A pleasant walk, a pleasant talk,
Along the briny beach. . .”*
—“The Walrus and the Carpenter”

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Wake

Who says the dead do not think of us?

—Mei Yao Ch'en

The paper mulberry
 shucks its fine-toothed hearts,
scribbled under with veins;
 palms cross-grained by interrupting lines.

On the south side of the house, milkweed
 swells, bursting with silk.

I occupy the shortened days with small tasks,
 bending over the washing machine
to pick burrs, tiny as green seed pearls,
 from the ribs of my socks.

Every morning a trail of leaves litters the hall,
 the dried footprints of water birds.
I sweep them onto the porch, into the dwindling yard.

Catching the echo of migrating geese,
 I lean on my broom to welcome
this departing call.

I. Aetiology

Episodic Memory

It's a poor sort of memory that only works backwards

—The White Queen

Moon jellies expand, contract,
into milky hearts though
they have none. Tiny harpoons
embedded in the dendrites.
One hippocampus chirps
in a thicket of gnarled sea horses,
bent and arthritic, and a whale
breaches, improbably, myelin white.
Outside the aquarium, Vancouver
flickers in light rain. I pull on
the wool sweater you forget
in a wet hickory wood, hiking
the Appalachian Trail. Along
the path, the bear that claws
apart your pack and roots
for candy bars crouches, silent
and wooden, in a Pacific totem.
Your head spins, crossing over
Fontana Dam, the Capilano Bridge,
me already on the other side, just
out of your shadow's fitful reach. Trust
the planks and neural underpinnings.
Waking in the under-construction
hotel, we'll skip over breakfast and walk
to Gastown, where, this time, we find
the custom umbrella shop. I get
a jellyfish, you get an octopus, and we
go wandering through grey puddles,
waving our silk tentacles. Darkness
falls in overlapping lobes, but
you remember a lantern. We glow,
dissolving into cobbled night.

Museum of Withdrawn Experiments

1. Abstract(s)

despite the squander of interstellar dust red-shifted from shells of t
until now, expansion of the unknown universe has remained uncert
hot clouds of relative analgesia (N_2O & O_2) have for several centuri
cultured cells stained with live/dead assay react covalently to protei
to the gravitational lens, swimming up from the background galaxy
however, concentration of nonbaryonic dark matter, carrying no ch
diluting the seventeen burnt-out minutes of big bang with backwar
study suggests, minimally, that symmetric coupling of brown dwarf
using compactification techniques, we predicted future null spells o

index terms: asymmetrical, green, relic radiation, lepton, opaque

2. Valence

undersky is the first paranoid shell.
unswerving. what passes, minimally,

for an excited state. paranoid, i'm
extracting the bright, overlapping

scales of sadness. this afternoon—
coughing its dusty blue light

on the wall like the beam of
an old film projector—is manganese.

on the bright, hilly side of town
women in lantern-hued shoes

gather with their parcels
of luxury scraps. they stitch

deft valentines from craft paper,
repurposed lace, braille pages

indecipherable to their blind white
fingertips. i'm not one of them.

alone, i cut deftly into a creased
square of organ-pink tissue paper;

what unfolds is not a heart but a set
of lungs, asymmetrical. engrossed,

humming, i slip them into a wool
envelope stitched with my ex-lover's

name. tomorrow he'll hang
them from the rear-view like a pair

of fuzzy, invisible dice—humming,
swerving into the right wrong turn.

3. Frequency

Shell game, thimblorig: keep shuffling this morning's
batch of tea kettles on the stovetop's three
working burners: red coil, red coil, red coil.

No combination can replicate, faithfully, the heartsick
train whistle ripping night into linen strips. Whistle
the screech of a night bird flying into an echo of its own

extinction. Bandage. Strung on the backyard clothesline,
the other not-right kettles clank like couplings
between boxcars. A burnt-out string of party lights.

Snub little snouts. Pause here and scoop a modest hollow
from the poem with your green-cankered spoon, a brown
furry space to paw through local categories of *alive*.

A lantern is only a lotus blossom when lit. A cricket
song is just a violin with frilly teeth-teeth. Teeth-teeth.
You'll discover two squirmy new word animals—

fritinancy and *stridulate*—in the empty kettles swaying
metallic and opaque on their slack rope, balky
and breathless. A gaudy necklace of celestial

carapaces blazes from the black queen's throat.
Every morning she vanishes into dawn's green
crease. Just a *slight* hollow. Not nearly deep

enough to bury an afternoon's squandered coins,
the bright chips of vowel in a newly dealt word,
the wavelength of a single sleight of hand.

4. Dark Matter (Research Proposal)

[Missing Mass Problem. How swarms of dead stars gnaw & gnaw at us. Burnt-out. Must not occupy so much disputed space. Red shift. Shift. Red shift. This study hypothesizes further undetectable matters. (Must not smile open-mouthed because too much dark matter between teeth). Gaps. Solution: extract dead weight from irregular galaxies. Invisalign.]

[Literature Review. Bartusiak, Marcia. *Through a Universe Darkly*. Boyle, Robert. *New Experiments Concerning the Relation between Light and Air (in Shining Wood and Fish); Made by the Honourable Robert Boyle, and by Him Addressed from Oxford to the Publisher, and So Communicated to the Royal Society*. Cathrall, Isaac. *Memoir on the Analysis of Black Vomit*. Conrad, Joseph. *Heart of Darkness*. Drexler, Jerome. *How Dark Matter Created Dark Energy and the Sun: An Astrophysics Detective Story*. Gribbin, John R. *Cosmic Coincidences: Dark Matter, Mankind, and Anthropic Cosmology*. Herschel, William, LL.D, F.R.S. *On the Nature and Construction of the Sun and Fixed Stars*. Latta, Sara L. *Stella Brite and the Dark Matter Mystery*. Rubin, Vera C. *Bright Galaxies, Dark Matters*.]

[Materials & Methods. black hole (3.8 Suns), chameleon particle, six known flavours of lepton, slab of Victory Brown wax, 3 oz. standard green pitch, small packet kosher salt, barnacle glue, dark lantern, hydrogen, time-resolved spectroscope, sterile neutrinos, Large Hadron Collider, haloes, brown dwarf, relic radiation, mass compactors.

First, cancel all balloon-borne experiments. With #11 X-Acto knife, cut out Train Wreck Cluster (Abell 520). Paste to back wall of diorama. On a cast iron plate, grind gravitational lens until noise of abrasive grains rolling between surfaces becomes faint. Polish with standard green pitch and set aside. Sand floor of diorama with high-silicate interplanetary dust particles (IDPs). Next, sculpt

and detail 3-inch figurine of Saint Vera Rubin from Victory Brown sculpture wax, face-transfer decal, organdy or other transparent cotton. Use your own hair. Infix grains of kosher salt for teeth. In left rear corner, affix colony of small-scale night-sky globes (0.75 inch circum.). Glue figurine in center. On top (roof) of diorama, mount 0.5 cm lens panel. Insert previously prepared lens. (See above).

[Forecast: Over-night lows with intermittent spells of self-deprecation & uncertainty. Dark and transparent.]

5. Molarity

in every science-decked gymnasium in every continental state—green, orange, yellow, purple, pink on pull-down maps—an extracted tooth decomposes in a glass jar of coca-cola. *noli tabescere*, half-baked little eggheads. *to melt, waste away, pine, be spoiled*. i'll take your teeth.

out the kitchen window, the branches of my deciduous tooth tree are studded with haggled pearls, milk teeth painted all the colors of milk: low-fat cream, reduced eggshell, whole lace, skim blue. haint. but somewhere, tucked up in sweet-burning ether, the tooth gatherer

yanks—knitting & bidding, bidding & clicking—with her blind-white fingertips—every tooth from every e-auction. molars, incisors, bicuspids dropped on her stoop in parcels the size of strawberry pincushions. how she painstakingly, patiently, pieces together her trousseau of baby teeth.

nimble queen greed. she's draining all the dental stock. my charm tree needs a toothier concentration (solution: switch back burnt-out tooth gene on birds?) to inoculate the REM against nightmare plagues—green, orange, yellow, purple, pink—infesting teeth. *to melt, waste away,*

be spoiled. sleep tight, little eggheads. i'll pluck those squandered teeth from your sweet-dreaming ether. add paw of mole, hare-brain amulet. (solution: rub gingiva with dead man's fingertip?) *for toothwark, if worm eateth the tooth, take henbane & wax, equal much, work into candle, burn.*