

The New Humors (1)

stein or no  
set on or in  
ironstone

no tin rose  
is a rose is a rose is

serotonin  
or tension in torsion

is one torn  
torn noise neon riots

siren onto rites no on  
ire son not risen onto

rose not in eros not in  
nine roots

one is torn  
reins onto aggression

no to rinse inner soot  
depression tires noon

sleep regulation snore  
into rest onion not

in eros no rote sin  
suicide notion &  
res sooner tin

stone iron ore in  
tons roe in tons

rose is a rose is  
inert soon



“The Misery of Scholars (& Scientists & Doctors of Law & Philosophy), being sundry discourses & pieces of evidence assembled towards a narrative with a digression on musicks for ‘something must be done with the excess flowering inside death’ & melancholy, you could say that this misery has heard of *objet petit a*.”

*Early Modern*

Autumn & earth are allied to its slick  
chemistry, thus  
the scholar’s semester begins  
when the blood best courses with its new vintage  
of black bile,  
the syllabus chock-full of polemics:

respublica & The New Money; the abject;  
the imaginary; the rights  
of animals & the end of Nature.  
Riding-out the latest airborne nerve agent  
(or it’s rumor  
from the liar-state) we suck on

ginger root. Here in the ivory tower of the middle-west  
where stipends pay  
at the end of the month, we’re left  
with hermeneutics & the lesser acids  
of cyclothymia,  
yet to begin with a phrase by Jack Donne

“those are my best dayes, when I shake with feare”  
beginning with a phrase.  
Then one of our best wits  
suicided:

*[no dog-rose]*

no dogrose  
can cure or cur-  
tail this rabid  
mind which must  
be put down—

here he comes now,  
compounded of flames  
& gristle, cataracts  
where genitalia  
should flower, black  
as sable, black & lithe—  
an angel dancing,  
no, shambling, now  
clowning of both

in grisly pantomime  
his face a mix of maw  
& mask, he removes  
his prosthetic nose,  
the room reeks of menthol  
cloaking decay & in  
the aperture, dirt  
speckled with quicklime  
seethes with maggots,  
some fluid cools to glass,  
here then is my knowledge  
~~beyond knowing,~~  
mystical: he carries  
a slapstick & wields it  
like a god-term—

*Poem Spoken to the Air*

The dons & doctors all counseled writing  
    &/or speech,  
as leeches to bleed the black humor from the blood,  
    the divines another story:  
the holy orders, their genius for the ordinate,  
    happy with marching-orders—

how does one face the priest who refuses  
    to bury your friend or lover  
(or the brother whom writing failed)? The test  
    of care is not  
the common meal, but respect for the absolute  
    right of burial: there are experts

on this right, suppliant women, schooled from the Book  
    of Denial, schooled  
in exile, schooled in opposition to the Law turned  
    realpolitik & run  
amok, the city's prodigal daughters—grief-razed,  
    god-awful—returned (with a heap

of ash, enough only to fill a jar) & bearing  
    a look—in-gazing, rapt,  
& charged with the violent history of its  
    seizure, now ready  
to seize—that we want to see as suffering-  
    perfected love; it is

not that easy, you taught me. After the fieldwork,  
    after the interviews, after  
those who you wrote of as the survivors began to disappear,  
    after partition, after  
another failed-state, after this last holy war, did you despair  
    to see how “mourning

Jeffrey Pethybridge, From *Striven, The Bright Treatise* (forthcoming 2013, Noemi Press)

becomes the law,” did you despair of the law  
itself, so ridden  
by power? (This is a hall of mirrors. I only wanted  
to be your fool,  
your Clown-King of Saturn, lauded for authoring the last  
modern novel, *The Lack*

*Bible*, written high on atrabile—I’ll be your  
Antigone).

*"The Fire of Culture"*

Among her last notes, on a pale gray linen paper she used for correspondence, S. had written "maybe Rose is right about Poussin's painting [*The Ashes of Phocion Collected by His Widow*] but in Euripides & Sophocles grief, the ritual work of mourning signified by completed rites doesn't avail, doesn't yield the spiritual catharsis of having undergone radical suffering; grief & its songs, cries howls are merely the sounds the human makes after the diremption of husband from wife, mother from child, sister, brother. The city, the law all our forms of love or knowledge, shelter are paltry—this is what grief lessons." The page contained one other note she'd written: "*poulet demi deuil*: book-party," & a doodle of two roasted chickens with lines of steam rising, one very detailed celery leaf.

S. was working on a book about mysticism & protest; she became her work, so we in solidarity shaved our heads, gave up on ecstasy & its tropes—the longed-for and “fantastique Ague,” the epileptic vision, slam-dancing—which was her specialty, & tried to burn alone with the “fire of culture.” That was not enough for me. She’d written the phrase—as ward or motto—around the perimeter of her bed. I slept in its ascetic folds, slept in her absence; finally, I dreamt I slept within the “fire of culture which [the scholar argues] is inevitably political in the Arendtian sense of the word.” Even that, love, is not enough for me.

*The House After The Forest & The Fever*

After the last battery of comprehensive exams, after the new tablets & alchemy were added to S M T W T F S, after assembling a revised dossier in defense of the self of recycled materials—see the motley suit draped over the chair drenched from the January she named “our harrowing season.” Even after news of the algorithms of total surveillance put the lie—once & for all—to the line that holds there’s a certain freedom in powerlessness *per se*. “A marginal & immiserated subject position doesn’t wear like a cloak of invisibility,” goes the new saw.

After shock therapy didn’t take & left a blank—after that which there will be no other after—& sublimation failed, yielded only my *Anatomy of Idleness*.

After the mind’s circuit of delusion under the Sphere’s loony influence ends, nothing dawns, no new life & nowhere: you’re still just tenant to the day, only now writing checks to this latest landlord, the irrevocable case of her death.

*After the Current of Disappearing Time Leaves You, Your Skin Smells of Ozone*

After the shock therapy didn't take, and left a blankness weighted like the dreadful waking from a recurrent nightmare that can't be recalled—after that which there will be no other after—& the new pills corroded what concentration grief had left me, I broke the pledge to myself, and read her diary as a child would have done home sick from school raiding the privacies of siblings & parents.

“As a scholar & writer, I think, J is a limited talent & perhaps he, too, senses this & this (unconscious) recognition explains how he takes as much pleasure in a pot of chicken curry that comes off, as when he's reached the finished form of an argument or chapter; this is an attitude toward household chores I refuse to cultivate, even as I delight in the saffron color & the contour of the coriander leaf. & yet sometimes I am terrifyingly bored by the sensuous & the material, at the worst times I hate the ordinariness of my body, it's silly limbs—is this frustration (perhaps this is the wrong word), ultimately, the source of my desire for fucking to be an exacting physical experience, sometimes violent; the far gone intensity of being fucked to orgasm doesn't last & it's not precisely a return to consciousness, for the Self has never been escaped, it is always there, albeit obscured for the moment, in the body's shadow, so as we lie like cursive letters (each in our own sweaty vessel) I am not with J, am not convinced (as he is) that this is a world of bodies, each body alone & racked with its own unrest, am not convinced that the orifices of the body exist solely so one may hook and twine oneself in them. I am a mind if I am not nothing.”

“I cannot write—I cannot write in this little ease of knotted perplexity—I am all riddle & can devise no solution. I can hardly speak when J asks how the work is going, it makes the hurrying to bed all the easier, for at least there in the dozen knots he binds my body with, I feel an objective correlative to my mind & feeling, this—more than the strictly sexual pleasure—is what I seek & submit to, a sensuous mirroring of the mind drawn out through the body’s devices, this I thank the lord for—”

“I have not eaten for the five days J has been gone at the symposium & have set myself to a rigorous fast; it is remarkable how quickly I’ve come to regard even tea or juice or water infused with vitamins as an indulgence, as though I can keep no vows; even as I try to be the wife to my own will & purpose, I am unfaithful.”

“My crooked lord & cook is to be kept longer researching & it will be the new year before J is back from the archives—god knows what game he is dreaming up for our reunion. Yet I am now at liberty to pursue my own experiments: hunger make me true.”

“I have kept my hunger strike now for three weeks & have taken to wearing my academic robes outside the usual ceremonies. To obscure both my motive & the reformation of my body, I drew a book stabbed & bleeding on the left sleeve & upon the right I’ve sewn wires into the robe as the snakes of a severed medusa head shackled to a chair; across the back I painted a skeleton holding a gardening watering-can. As I move about the campus (increasingly like a shadow, for the hunger seems to make me quieter) my brothers & sisters regard my medieval form as my cardinal ‘political statement.’ The need for which they chalk up to my being a ‘colonial.’”

“Today (the fortieth day of my fast) was a day of absolute clarity. It was as if all my thinking were some great play & today the first day of rehearsals, yet my thoughts were not a troupe of underpaid players hesitantly going through the motions, making their marks with timidity, but the kind of practice where new insights are generated through the surprises of embodiment & interaction. Sir Imagination hardly calling directions to the cast, instead he busily jotted in his notebook all the necessary revisions taking shape as the scenes played out. & then as everyone broke for water & ale, my thoughts summoned their own harlequin to gibe & sing to keep the company’s spirits up, as they all sat around eating those little cucumber sandwiches their mother’s brought to church picnics. I mocked the boys for their nostalgic talk and ready sentimentality.”

“After yesterday’s (seeming) triumphs, today is a terrible reversal as if some god flipped a coin, and the crown coming up signals a fit of confusion & melancholy torpor—see the fish in its final death-flaps as it bakes on the pave. Thinking is a sick heat.”

“If silence be the (noble) end of mysticism & protest, the silence of absolute communion with the other & the silence of peace & justice respectively, if silence be the end, it cannot, it must not, therefore, be the means; the mystic must go through language & undergo her exile within the symbolic; she must find an escape, wholly her own & finally ineffable, from her quarantine within the house-rule of so much meaningless speech. So too, she who would become a force against the machinery this world-system, that sum of fields & flux & bodies laced by spider-like intentions riding on the very pains & pleasures we take in moving in their web, & where each movement augments the degree of our entanglement in the myriad relationships that arise through our contending, exchanging, loving; she who would become a counterforce against this industry must, for she herself is knotted in it guts, must undergo the violence of becoming a voice—for there is violence in abandoning private contemplation. Worse yet, she must join her voice to the other swarming voices (as they join & are scattered & join again only to be dispersed by the riot of tear gas & rubber bullets & rooftop snipers— those little gods choosing) as they try to gain the square to become the very saying of the cause. Silence=Protest read the placards in martyr-square today & though it is a lovely sentiment, it is the very sign that the erosion of the collective will of this ecstatic body politic has begun, & all my beautiful young cousins being beaten by their war-hardened uncles have achieved all they ever will achieve, which is respect for their bravery & criticism for their misunderstanding the means to setting power aright. Who am I writing here with my passport & visa all in order: safe I nothing am. I am starving. I am driving toward the desert of sound, driving toward *le baptisme du solitude*. O cold desert night, let my hunger be my quarantine; let my hunger be the desert night in which one confronts the bare fact of existence most purely, & may I derive from that minimal condition an essence—are all minimalisms knights errant for Essence?) Let silence equal hunger & let hunger equal protest, or at least let this hunger strike remake the terms of my privation; may the terms be mine own & lasting. Let me, god let me, even now as the crystal snowflakes silently strike my leaded glass, melt, sliding on the very transformation of their outward shape (for the essential bonded structure obtains even through this seeming devolution), let me not think this attention to how the snowy water now paints the window a violation of my vow to hunger; let these excited thoughts not lead my will back to colluding with that world in which Sir Imagination calls out directions to actors: “to the board, to the chamber, to the shit-house, to the monkey-bars, to the submarine. Remember now hush boys, hush girls, hush” Now puppets are dancing, & all the while the Rector is taking names, carving them into his own forearm, which grows as the list of names grows, & half the band

leaves the pit playing a dead march, while the remaining instruments are loosed upon solitary musicks, & I am trying to find some stay against it all, trying to find some purchase, so that I can finish the sentence I am trying to wend my way through, but am troubled, am seized by the thought that my thinking must have an outward tell that will call the Rector's gaze to my seat & number & name & the dozen knots he'll bind my body in will yield neither erotic transport, nor expiation of the stress of wearing a body day in & day out across a campus or a field, nor will his rope-work be the objective correlative of my mind or metaphysick, for the Rector's designs entail the very obliteration of all such categories, & he is mighty in his advantage as the wind picks up the list (our names), & his designs, & arguments fill the air like so much snow or flak or confetti, & you hear—where are you now—in the creative destruction of the dead march over & against the contending of all those solitary songs, his very anthem”

*Grief-Debt*

the double-mark: the right  
to life & the rule of seizure  
& dispossession in-  
scribed (inherited) in  
this janus-being,  
January, she wrote, will be  
our harrowing season,  
prisoner to its two-  
faced hours, a new year  
for two-faced feelings,  
the physick all winter-  
sick with the metaphysical,  
& musick too, its confession  
hidden in backmasking.

back in the hidden masking  
a confession & musick too,  
the metaphysical sick  
with winter, the physick  
all sick with feelings with  
two faces, hours faced  
anew, the year prisoner  
to its harrowing season,  
prisoner all January  
she wrote for two  
who are inscribed  
in this janus-being (in-  
herited in dispossession)  
& seizure of life, the rule  
the double-mark, the right.

Stanzas Of & To That Portion Of The Selfe Waked & After Reading *Biathanatos*

You love (& feare to love)  
the form & physick of your confession,  
its accurate & equal musick set  
to dissevering the real from frisson,

your song of scrutiny gone through  
the heap of you, through the hap & gist of you,  
that heap of books & debts & days gone  
so wrong in the head you manage to wilt

spinach in a skillet only that much  
or a sandwich. The disparity  
your physick is (inordinate temper,  
discordant humors—you your own polity

at civil warre) you feare, yes, but also  
love, for being the informing  
source of your confession, its dis-  
severing suicide as no rote sin,

& not in eros. You were drug-tired,  
at a loss, a heap of feelings with two  
faces, a hall of mirrors, really, when you  
first saw reason in a study of this

paradox, you yet believed in equal musick,  
accurate, & nothing beyond its form & physick.

*ps.*

The April window will  
be open or, the breeze  
& carnival noise  
winding up will play  
the hotel curtain,  
or we'll joke that this time  
of year is best, since the tourists  
aren't there yet, & we'll take  
that bottle of sherry  
for the chill after swimming,  
& at the beach we'll be  
wit    sun    tide