

A SMALL BOOK FOR BRIAN WOOD

These poems were written looking at Brian Wood's drawings in the catalogue of his recent show. The poems respond to individual drawings, but do not presume to describe or discuss them—they, like so much, are simply or complexly what comes to mind. The order of the poems does not relate to the order of the images in the catalogue, but only to the rhythm, of my glance.

--RK, August 2019

The line meets itself
we come around
and meet ourselves departing

o white sky of dawn
silence is the longest opera

*

Sometimes things have a way
of being in two
places at once
the forest and the sea
the castle and the emergency room
that is how love came to be
a tuft of frizzy hair around the heart

*

**Learn the magnetism of without desire.
The horse you ride may be your mind
and God knows where it carries you
prairie puszta grasslands steppes
sometimes I can feel winter in your bones**

**The hardest thing of all
is trying to make sense of sense.**

**A foot away from the eye
a magnifying glass
turns the world upside down.
Fact. God send us distances!**

People inside our bodies
mill around chatting
philosophies and other fashions
of the mind. Leave me alone
I'm tempted to tell them
but then I would be alone.
Alone inside.

*

When we were kids
they put us on horses
smiled and took pictures.
The horses are still there
I see them in your drawings
the fierce muscular empty
spaces between the lines

*

Lying in the field
on my belly I thought
the roots of little plants
were great trees
between me and the sky,
seemed a jungle, God,
sometimes the size
of things breaks my heart.

*

In the darkest part of night's crystal
a pyramid arose, speechless,
waiting for us to speak to it,
say anything, say Mass on its bones
as once, once we-- but that's
another story, another night.
How did you learn so much
about the world that isn't even
there yet despite all our yearning?

*

A harp
her hands
strum-stroking
along the strings
high out there
to low in here,
hands unzipping
a skirt. Or just a coat,
fawn colored,
leather.

*

Mushroom giving a sermon.
Vegetation is so religious,
no wonder we stand around
in cold stone churches
pretending to be flowers.
Or carrots. Or winter kale,
wounded by mythology.

*

How serious a line is!
so thin you'd think it
would be Vienna frivolous
but no, it's solemn,
an anguished melody
wrenched out of Sibelius,
a simple line. O ink
of the world, how you sing.

*

Hair swept back
we meet the wave.
From so far away
it has come
to be here, here
is the furthest place.

*

It takes more than trumpets and drums
to turn a dog into an army--
what kind of person would let a dog
anyhow? Open spaces feel for a way out--
all that music like that does
is stifle the sound of our own blood.

*

In France the hedgehog nestles
in the tall grass of the berm
along the Roman road.
Cute and prickly
like the thought of home.
Herisson. Or a child at a table
alone on a sidewalk cafe.

*

You can't help
what you see.
The eye is a feather
that tickles the world
until it talks.

*

Out of the storm cloud
an immense rose
descends over the village.
The townspeople cry
and laugh or hold their breath--
will love come with it,
will they smell it in their sleep?

*

**The reproductive organs
of a square
or any geometric figure
are clean of germs
as we used to call
agents of distress and dismissal
but even Euclid knew better.**

**The saguaro cactus
outside the minor league stadium
trembles to the roar of the crowd--
our games are tough on the natural world.**

The pen never left the paper
till the world was done.
Shipyards and queasy diners,
a girl walking along a cliff--
it's all in the Bible if you look hard
enough.

*

Kite over the Hudson
Morningside Heights
those Japanese!
But then I remember
rivers do all the work
and we float here and there
signless kites in pure atmosphere!

*

Achilles in the story
kills Hector and degrades
his body. Makes me wonder
what really happened.
The little boy his father
fall then fell himself.
We do all we can to get
out of the story.

*

My father's Pontiac
empty, windows open,
side rod, field of cabbages
far as I can see, sixty years
doesn't last long, wrong
verb, same sunshine
beating down.

*

I hold these lines
clenched
high in the air
every message
you can imagine
tries to squeeze
its way through
to you, to you.

*

Boukranion
the sacred bull horns
of Krete
all they needed
was some god
to stretch strings
between them
and lyre away on them
till even we can hear.

*

Suppose a sister
sat on a sunbeam
on your lawn
and she called it
from the sky--
what then?
what color
would answer that?

*

Silver shillings in Scottish purses
and an animal of some sort
peers out of its den,
small, small, pika or chipmunk,
liberty is always on the other side.

*

Pick up the wheel
and carry it
it still will guide you
where to go--
all our destinations
are stored in our machines.

*

Cyclone weather
a basketball crushed
beneath a fallen bough
an old word signifying poetry

*

The line says read me
says need me
but we all say that

*

I saw a wolf once
we were walking north
and he passing south
we watched each other
respectful. A yard between us.
There are still neighbors
left in the world.

*

And I alone
am left to tell thee
meant Ishmael
and yet the whale's mouth
opened like a flower
upright, a calla lily
gasping from the sea.

*

Strap yourself in
roll up the windows
and drive through the tunnel,
that long one at Saint-Die
miles of it under the Vosges
grey smoke of all our goings
leaves wreaths of almost
meaning we drive through
and almost is a pretty place

*

War was coming when I was young,
it came and killed and went away
but never all the way away, hate to say it
but it's like a song once heard
Americans can never quite forget.

*

When lines I mean
fold in upon themselves
anger happens.
The street fills with people
wearing the wrong shirts
and women fleeing from
the shadows they cast as they run.
When line meets line
a tension twists
matter into new spaces,
shouts in the street, bright
blue buses pump out exhaust.
Damn it, we've made ourselves
a city again, when all we wanted
was to walk with a friend on a hill.

*

Come Upstate and dream the city--
this is best. It tastes like cough syrup,
sweet and sharp at once, remember
Cocillana? Probably not. A groove
runs through the cranium inside
divides past from present, and over it
a bridge stretches, narrow, narrow,
and the toll to cross it is terribly high.

*

Just before the storm
a white deer
stepped down the hill
to where the bird seed
spilled from the feeder
then as the trees darkened
went back up the rise
stood white then unappeared.

*

Between two lines
a breath of wind
add a third
and music comes,
four makes a beast
roar gently in
your own sweet woods,

*

Every white space
is an animal
every line
is what's on its mind.
Thinking scars
the surfaces we see.

*

An altar rail
sleeps between
the doing
and the done.
At it it is said
we receive.
I saw a picture
of those distances
space coming down the stairs.

*

Evening wants to come again
you can hear it sighing
all through the morning--
it sounds like a piece of paper
lofted by the wind. It sounds
like a line on the palm of your hand
or your mother's hand
when once you found her crying
and asked her why, why?
And she said Because
the nights are all gone.

*

A line is a summary
of all absent things.

*

