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The Rapid Unexpected

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The Rapid Unexpected

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Department of English
College of Arts and Sciences
University of South Florida

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Peter Meinke, Ph.D.
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Dedication

For Fiona Katharina and Giacomo Daniele—*You are what I cannot write*

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The Rapid Unexpected

Daniel Pantano

ABSTRACT

These lyric poems were written between August 2003 and June 2005 and bear witness to the human condition in all its facets, from birth and the first taste of lemon ice to exile and suicide. Within a landscape that encompasses many locales, the poems included here attempt to portray the particular to denote the universal and are always confronted by the ineffable connection between the two.

Innumerable poems projected in rapid succession create the illusion of a narrative. Every poem, however, is enveloped by bursts of whiteness: the mystery of breath and revelation.

STRANGER

I first saw her in the mirror of the burnt hall
Her white hair spreading across Europe

STREETS THAT END IN YOUR NAME

*A city will not remember your name
unless you find it in her streets.*

But youth unearths
its names as pages
torn from a banned text:
a scrapbook of stains.

We cannot allow this city to ignore us.

We piss our names
on the wall of the cathedral.
Watch how every letter
seeps through history.

*When the night seizes its wounds
no one is a stranger.*

Beneath the onerous arch,
we scorch our maps.
Sow ashes for the Lost.
All the Lost.

Everything is real; nothing can be stolen.

Our legless voices snap
an unknown poet's lines.
A bough broken
across worn doorways.

*Have you been hurt?
Come and take a close look.*

Climb the highest walls.
Sit. Drink another bottle.
Toss it. See it fall.
Howl as it shatters.

EVERY MOMENT OCCURS AFTER
A SEQUENCE OF LOOKS

anticipate the whipping beauty of Aztec women
accustomed to euphoria within the word

inform the reader he's unable to solicit the final embalming

language consists of minute fractures beneath every climax

confirm the impossible: to fully comprehend any experience
we can die instantly and laugh about it

proclaim days are dominated by sex, verbs, red paint

witness the death of a praying mantis
as brown women finally tremble

SPADAFORA, SICILY

Upon crossing the crowded promenade of a Sicilian fishing village
one experiences the metamorphosis of a neighborhood

with its colonies of wild, black-haired women

its faded architecture gutted by salt

its voices shepherded by wine and lava

its parameter stretching towards mountain orchards

and its aroma of religious perspiration, infernal passion

and ancient gastronomy

by blessing the dormant boats

and delicately pushing the sun beyond the dynamics of the sea

TABLE #8

Splinters of thoughts
seem indecent.

Paddling, staggering back.
His gaze stitched onto her dress.

He finishes dinner
and remains, evermore
feeling comfortably fascinated.

FALLEN

My grape harvest appeared meaningless.

Until, among the vineyard's knotty ruins
I found her phosphorescent skin, her mind
buttressed by November's gelid veins.

To her intent, I knew my thirst
was immutably bound. So I crushed her body
with the phallic weight of August

trousers unbuttoned, skirts raised by gypsy hymns,
objects most necessary to the hour of my birth,
to douse my lips with her caustic sap.

Every grape reveals a different poison.
Every woman stems from a different grape.

FUGUE

night harvests her scent

.
unfurled limbs:

the calligraphy of seduction

.
nomads whisper sixty-nine borders

.
dermal concord

.
every crossing a pant of energy

.
every penetration a lacuna of refuge

AND THE CORRESPONDENCE
AMONG OURSELVES

remains anonymous

we are not bothered by the faces
of frayed women who escaped
the washed milieu:
mustaches and aftershave

we are not bothered by the smell of oranges

only the taciturn call of dusty furniture
and life's murder in silver frames
tighten our chains

for ghosts have a facile way
of penetrating our soul's cracked mortar

they rest within
inflict a tender instant
and exit

only to return unannounced
over and over and over

PEDIGREED HANDS

The old Sicilian recalls American soldiers
who traded cigarettes for wine and tomatoes

Baby-faced freedom fighters
who trafficked their way into heritage

tasted their fathers' burnt land
quenched mothers' heat of poverty

touched lives with pedigreed hands

unlike their British counterparts
who abandoned their promises

once the tomatoes were eaten
and the bottles of wine emptied

VALKYRIE THIGHS

Everything becomes nuclear . . .crystallized . . .faceted
The impact catapults me out of the seat
and onto a mountain of Valkyrie thighs—I'm home again

In the distance, ravens feast on schoolbooks and suburban girls
They cannot run anymore
Listen to the old house speak gently to its insolent dogs

Here, restrictions are incomprehensible
Notebooks are currency
Who can say the least earns the newest fashions

We eat tomatoes before they are green

THE OLDEST HANDS IN THE WORLD

On this chair, as I am every morning, waiting
for the cappuccino and *briosch* to arrive,

and the girl with the oldest hands in the world,
I sense exile is a city reared by eternal artifice.

All sweet violence and thought and repetition.

Beyond what history has left of this topography,
the cup is whiteness, the coffee brown semen.

My first sip makes her appear with provender
and sandals from behind the insignificant ruins.

But for the time being, ruins are eucalyptus trees.
And she not a girl on her way to feed chickens

but a face concealed by dripping nets. Dressed
in black sails and hair dyed a Roman blonde.

The lips of her soul are burning sages, I know.
Her name, I don't. Only her hands matter.

Laden with broached scars they remind me—
home is where children sprout in rippled soil.

Where footsteps are mosaics of possibility.

To go on. Finish breakfast. Read the line
that ends in God's breath. Again.

CICADAS IN THE VALLEY OF TEMPLES

for L. Pirandello

Offer the Akragantine men an origin of movement
a nexus with the glorious temples which filter modernity

FOREIGN POLICY

The Sicilian theatre erupted with laughter
as the attractive American woman
requested a cappuccino after dinner

In response she rose to pierce
the gallery of blood oranges
with her Italian-made stilettos

WHEN SIGHT BECOMES UNBEARABLE,
SPRING 1945

Miles outside the camp, the very last
cattle car stood yet to be discovered.

In it, men, women, and children,
who had torn each other's eyes out,

sat with open wrists, listening.

To what?

Blood drying as tears
on unblemished skin.

Barred shafts of light
unhinging gates.

A heartbeat. Its decrescendo
to the coda's final note:

when sight becomes unbearable,

the voice of darkness is the hope
in every mother's womb.

EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK

My infant son is the moon.
His face with the crescent smile.

Sleep's music renders us equal.

Soon, we shall dance
in the morning
forest of olive trees.

EROSION

When the crisis of the sea announces her anger
the island women fasten their clotheslines
hang used panties for the wind to carry their scent
across the triangular land

And as the sea's spontaneous capitulation
adjourns another conquest
the men in the mountains
thank their saint for fertile land

and curse the coastal women for their wretched games

VISIT AFTER A FAILED REVOLUTION

You cannot see
the famous writer

The police relocated him
and kissed him good-bye

and one of them kept on saying
Tell us about it . . .tell us about it

What do you do?

I thought we might all be of that something

SIMIC'S ARMY OF SPIDERS

He orders them to his New Hampshire basement.

It is 1990.

He gives no reasons. Only the promise
to entertain with moths and fireflies

made from nails, aluminum foil, wire.

The spiders realize poetry writing's
offal doesn't suit dainty stomachs.

And march to stage their gossamer putsch.

Head thrown back. Eyes trampled raw.
Stringing sentences on a neck of war.

Simic bleeds in his study.

Hears them hail his lesion. Knot arachnid snares.
Chart untold festivals in honor of the coup d'état.

A wounded prey, he shares their vision.

To spin a web of names.
Trap something so immense.

Its every pore—a country of light.

VENETIAN DUET

we step onto the narrow bridge

she lifts her skirt

summons me to play
her succulent violin

draw my tongue's tip
across black strings

compose the sonata
of a million unborn sins

nocturnes circulate
as the evening sighs

the adagio of executions

TIME

their last embrace

to conserve this moment
he imagines time
as a kaleidoscope of lovers

every artless turn a new possibility

*

as a circle
every embrace infinite in its repetition
eternal recurrence of immutable gestures

one can let go—and simply wait . . .

*

is discontinuous
glimpses of the sometime / the impending / the steps of travelers
the first taste of lemon ice / the numbness of hands
every embrace a filament of light

*

without quality
his grasp resembles a dying child
lovers never leave
intensity dictates the duration of every touch

*

as reflection
ballistics, propelled emotions

(mirrors populate the panorama—all is shared a thousandfold)

every departure a bulwark of pain

*

without memory
she fades into the pulse of foreign scriptures
as his eyes scan pages for the familiar
every good-bye is death

*

world without Time

still life of a final kiss

*

as woman
gently her arms wrench away to a future past
their first coitus, their first encounter
the day her eyes will mean nothing to him

UNTITLED

What I enjoy about chaos is the guarantee of creation
The rapid unexpected

TRAKL'S SEASON

Every image secrets its most haunting confession.

How to distinguish between voice and breeze
in this lonely season?

Trace the maple's grief
or follow blackbirds' lament into spring?

With frigid hands brushing
against burning poppy fields.

A seat.

The reverie of decaying laughter
from soldiers with shattered mouths.

And the wait for a stranger's lost shadow
to muddle this autumnal foliage

as evening greets ancient pilgrims,
whose voices once rested here to join

the discussions of drowned children.

EVERY SO OFTEN

remembrance appears
around the corner

via a piece of literature
a freshly picked fruit
a scent

echo of an innocent view

it appears as a reminder:
nothing in our lives ever disappears

it all merely lingers—faceless
here and there

and every so often
it knocks on your door
seeking shelter for the night

LULLABY

Voices through my window.
The myth of grapes, cacti, burning fuel.

Headlights through my window.
Prowling Scirocco wind—tango of ruffled ash.

A tamed evening departs.
Darkness lit in red African sand.

I notice my daughter's slumberous smile.
Cough heavily across waters.

Flames rise to devour a hill
amidst the Sicilian night.

SAMBUCA NIGHT

I feel most alive mingling
with the beasts and giants
of the mountains.

Hearing the fanfare
announcing the barks
of wild Sicilian dogs.

THE VOYEUR OF PÈRE LACHAISE

Surrounded by midnight's muted architecture
barefooted—I slink across cobbled walkways

quietly observe stony mourners unrobe
sculpted relics ploddingly seeking entry

polished skin invading cocoons of death

I listen for their first shared breaths
as they repose by their fretted dead

and only when marble lips stress brittle bone
do I abscond to haunt the next sepulchral act

yet no act will ever echo the first shared breath
the moment the dead lost all regrets—the night

I saw two angels making love in the living grass

WITH FIONA, AGE 2, IN THE GARDEN

You enjoy no equals
in the infinite world of perception.

Recognize the root of an appearance,
advance with confidence and ease,

respond to its smiles as you turn
to behold my ignorant gaze.

Know that your every glance assembles
my reunion with the essence of existence,

my retreat from time and knowledge:
science of life's bastard progenies.

PATRIMONIAL RECIPE

I swore never to wear my father's mask.

Yet I meticulously peel and cut tomatoes.
Crush garlic. Pluck basil bent
low in observance. One
by one. Push them off the plank.

Into the fervid blonde of olive oil.

Salt. Pepper. Dash of sugar.
Then I sit down at the table.
Yell at my children for being children.
Ignore my wife—her voice:

the steam of boiling water.

And wait for the perfect consistency.
Al dente. The callous core that weeps

when overcooked.

4:36 AM

for G. Smith

The poet who forgets to eat when his lovers are away
sits up in bed and instantly tears off his skin
to exploit raw, secure movement—turns

fondles her with dangling nerves

Pardon me, you mind a drink?
Naturellement, the Word says

(a few pubic hairs sticking
to the bottom of her tongue)

Le Pont Mirabeau is never far

He fucks with injurious vision.

SPEEDOMETER NEEDLE

Foot anchored, its head lashes past lit auguries.

Governed by eyes firm to embrace, to forge
a carbon fiber skirt around the nearest tree,

its slash body, mounted by g-forces, succumbs
to an impetuous grin: acceleration's blackout.

Hood furrowed / Chassis rived / Headlights craned

Man's invention which most resembles a living thing
bears the same fatal flicker as our suicidal tongues

anticipating the metallic savor of a .40 caliber cock.

WITNESS

realize the inability to emulate the basic pattern
hear the blatant silence of dynamos
feel the will's sudden sting

.....

moments carved in transient silhouettes
veil the evening's restless minds

an acquiescent walk towards a dark room
captures the image of bloodshot eyes

smiling at the young mother and her gun

WOOD OF SUICIDES

Drop this soil
sodden with torment

before the scalpel rain
peels your twined fist.

Drop it by the thicket
where you kissed children,

dug your fingers into the dirt,
buried them without prayer.

Drop it.

Mark the causality of sin,
of forgiveness, alongside

the river Phlegethon's seething
maelstrom, its spiral narrative,

your barked soul
that no longer shelters your scars.

ESCAPE ARTIST

My mother missed her own funeral.

Why or how she did it is a mystery.
Or a fantasy. I barely remember.

The blow of absence that shut the priest's
voice like a child's very first nightmare.

The lump of air in my throat I kneaded
until it became smoke, became breath.

Language nestled up against silence.

A lunatic sashaying past, grinning,
Doesn't anyone know where she is?

What can I say? We all missed it. And left.

*Well, no wonder, someone muttered
on my way past the holy water,
She's a suicide, you know . . . and a whore.*

Yes, I thought.
Not even God can create a net without holes.

THEATRE DU GRAND GUIGNOL

Fifty lifeless characters animated.

The audience, astonished, reflected upon the preeminent importance:
a curtain that never falls.

Performance and terror often contained an unconscious existence

vacuous eyes

nonchalantly rising above any great and definite achievement,
while the Playbill attended a memorable ceremony:

a writer's death flanked by language.

Recently, the stage conceived a stranger, a sage, matters of occultism,
in an attempt to stimulate man's inner need
to move toward an addressable reality.

But the audience still believed in imitation, nothing more . . .

the applause raucous.

About the Author

Daniel Pantano is an award-winning poet, translator, and editor of several European and American literary journals (*Härter*, *Niederengasse*, *M.A.G.*). Of Sicilian and German parentage, he was born in Langenthal, Switzerland, in 1976. His individual works have been featured in journals and anthologies in Europe, Asia, and the United States. He lives in Brandon, Florida, with his wife and two children.