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MITCH'S MILIUS MAGICARNUM

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Abstract:

Poetry, both as an aesthetic and academic field, has produced norms and standards which have come to appear as immutable boundaries: natural edges that determine what *is* and *is not* the domain of poetry. *Milius Magicarnum* plays on these borders, exploring what poetry can be through a tracing process which takes Derridian deconstruction and strives to account for its tendency to produce linear temporality. Benjaminian constellation-theory is used as an orientation device to produce poetry which explores the relations between things on their own terms, and to expand our perspective beyond those seemingly natural boundaries. The collection investigates the informative power of the environment on poetry: how mediums, language registers, even spaces and times can leave indelible marks upon a poem. The conditions of poetry are what made those pseudo-immutable norms, and *Milius Magicarnum* investigates what poetry might look like under different conditions and in different worlds. In so doing, *Milius Magicarnum* accesses moments of impossibility: poems which define their own geometries, their own margins and spacings, their own languages which would be impossible under a more traditional model. This power of language to break open ontological assumptions is metaphorized throughout *Milius Magicarnum* as a supernatural force, much like a witch's incantations. The real uniqueness of the collection lies in its engagement, not just with the norms of poetry as an artistic genre, but also the norms of poetry as a field of academic study. It seeks to expand what we consider when writing poetry, but also what we consider when we research and write about poetry as scholars in a field full of those conditional standards.

Tracing, Finding, Casting:

the Impossible Movements of *Milius Magicarnum*

Language operates within the invisible channels of our culture just as much as language builds those channels. The production of rhetoric is somehow simultaneously a process of navigation and construction, cartography and architecture: we are both Theseus, grasping at Ariadne's thread for anchorage and a chance at returning home, and we are Daedalus, building the labyrinth and its inescapable halls with the mortar of our words. It is, in many ways, the tragic contradiction of language, that the more we articulate our situation and the more words we apply to a problem, the denser the phantasmagoric web of rhetoric surrounding that situation becomes and the farther we pull from material reality. This is something critical to remember as we proceed through this essay, and then as you venture into *Milius Magicarnum*: all rhetorical analysis is an intimate representation of the ways meaning is produced as much as it is a pseudo-objective attempt to categorize the movements of meaning from afar. Poetry is much the same: it is exploration and it is commentary; it is analysis and it is experience; it is art and it is scholarship. This is the work of such wonderful poets as Gloria Anzaldúa, who produce theory through poetry and poetry through their theory. We must never become so preoccupied with the tenets of our investigation that we forget how the search itself informs what we will find.

Spellslinger poetics is my attempt to produce poetry which represents and investigates language in this way. Poetry which is aware of the conditions of its own birth, aware not only of the political and physical spaces into which it was placed, but aware also of the contours of genre and language; Poetry which sees the immutable stone walls of assumption (those assumptions which are really the result of particular coincidences and historical conditions, but which appear like inherent borders on thought and genre) as illusory fences; Poetry which accomplishes those things which seem *impossible* for poetry to do. Spellslinging poetics takes those assumptions that have become entirely naturalized and turns them on their head: I am thinking of Anthony Cody's

Borderland Apocrypha, and its sentence-modeling poems, which mock the traditional grammarist's sentence-modeling exercises and endeavors to unpack just how much meaning is implied in the simplest of sentences. To Cody, the structures of our language are as helpful for communication as they are misleading, insofar as we don't properly face the ways that those structures infect our rhetoric. Or consider font: if you read a poem printed in 12-point, Times New Roman font, you may not consciously think about the font at all, but that does not mean the font has not altered your perception of the poem. Spellslinging poetry forwards that every font is a conscious choice which informs the poem, and that no rhetoric is ever consumed in a vacuum. Consider "**Cryptify**" on page 31, whose blocky bolded font structures the sharp-edged aesthetic of the poem, or "The Hound of Culainn" on page 51, where the Cúchulainn's monstrous transformation transforms the poem itself: its font and its geometry. Just as with Cody's *Borderland Apocrypha*, *Milius Magicarnum* strives to leave no stone unturned, no spell uncast, no condition of our language uninvestigated.

Font is not the only naturalized barrier girding our poetry; see what magic is performed by "GRENDDEL UNCHAINED" on page 14, which shatters the margin in its bestial lunge for freedom. Or consider "MALaphor" on page 41, which plays with the register of the collection. "MALaphor" is aware that so much of *Milius Magicarnum* rests in an archaic register of language and that so much of the collection's mystique is in the way it mimes an older, more fantastical kind of English, so "MALaphor" complicates the collection's presentation by referring to prosaic props of the modern age: frying pans and car engines. Read "SMOKE THROUGH BAMBOO SHOOTS" on page 43 and see how the poem has displaced the very shape of the page. If you were to read a poem printed on a 1-inch by 24-inch strip of paper, the vessel itself might be the only thing you took away from the experience, but "SMOKE THROUGH BAMBOO SHOOTS" forces you to recognize that an 8.5-inch by 11-inch piece of

paper informs what is written on it as much as any other container. In exposing the edges of the page and presenting a poem atop softened noise (rather than atop a white expanse struggling to emulate blankness) “SMOKE THROUGH BAMBOO SHOOTS” exposes the way that a canvas is not a vacuum for poetry to be accessed from but a stage for it to be performed upon.

It is not only the norms of genre which *Milius Magicarnum* tries to invert: the structures of the English language are as valid a playground as any. Consider three poems which I would place on a continuum for you: “Close your eyes.” in Act I, page 26, “SCRYING” in Act II, page 66, and “200 Years of Silence” in Act III, page 77. These poems rigorously investigate what is actually required for language to become meaning, and in so doing investigate the mechanism that carries particular sound compositions into the realm of semiotics. “Close your eyes.” attempts to portray a life devoid of grammar. The reader is not presented with intricate sentence-work portraying the relationships between objects, and is instead given a constant stream of images and moments which nonetheless provide the illusion of time passing. Typical English writing, in its left-right and up-down motion, produces a very linear temporality which almost chauffeurs a reader through the poem, but “Close your eyes.” forces a reader to produce their own time system, to trace the connections between these objects in winding, nonlinear pathways. This is another important assumption which Spellslinger poetics bucks up against: traditional temporality which provides stability and rationality (and makes a poem easier to read), but which girds a readers’ ability to interpret the poem.

“SCRYING” takes this logic another step further. “SCRYING” has no words at all, just letters splashed about the page like an ink-blot test. A reader is forced to try and find meaning among the madness, the poem’s illegibility reducing the reader to illiteracy. There are words hidden among the letters, and the longer one stares at “SCRYING” the more one finds: is that enough to make a poem? “SCRYING” gives no hints on how it wants to be read, and countless

different approaches to reading it would yield countless different interpretations and experiences, each identifying and focusing onto different bits of meaning. If “Close your eyes.” asks whether a poem needs grammar or linear temporality, “SCRYING” asks if a poem needs words: how much can we ask of a reader? Does a poem need to offer up its meaning to any and all passerby, or does a poem simply need to be an aesthetic object that we can glean meaning from?

Finally, “200 Years of Silence” appears, and drags this conversation into sobering quiet. “200 Years of Silence” has no words, no ink at all, besides the title. There is no poem: or can silence be a poem? “200 Years of Silence” is even more inaccessible than “SCRYING” and it balks at temporal categorization even more than “Close your eyes.” but there is still reading to be done: the title itself can be analyzed, its font and surrounding box; the shape of the page itself can be analyzed, as with “SMOKE THROUGH BAMBOO SHOOTS” earlier; the relation of that silence to the surrounding poems (especially in the context of a collection which tends to jabber on ceaselessly) can be analyzed. “200 Years of Silence” makes a reader question how meaning is produced, because if “SCRYING” was pushing at the edges of meaning-making, then “200 Years of Silence” must have flown past that line. Yet, are there things that can be said in silence? Can meaning be conveyed without any linguistic structure at all? At first, “200 Years of Silence” seems like nothing at all, but as I’ve already discussed,

a white sheet of paper is anything but blank.

Even if the sheet carries nothing on it (which I disagree with), it can still be analyzed in *relation* to its surroundings. Each poem of *Milius Magicarnum* is as much a stand-alone artifact as it is a single point in a larger composition, defined and given shape only in the lines drawn between it and other points. This approach to aesthetics is informed as much by Derridian tracing as it is by the Benjaminian notion of the ‘constellation.’ Derrida’s process of deconstruction, which analyzes etymology, sonics, and syntax, is very good at identifying the subjectivities

which cannot be escaped, the meanings that can never be crystallized, the words that can never be translated, all because of the real conditions of language. To a deconstructivist, the distinction between ‘blood’ and ‘sanguine’ is not a matter of parts of speech: it is a matter of Germanic versus Romantic roots. ‘Blood’ is a harsher, more violent word because it is derived from Anglo-Saxon and ‘sanguine’ is ornate because it is derived from French. Why is French perceived as a more ornate language? Perhaps because the aristocrats of England spoke French after the arrival of William the Conqueror, or perhaps because French’s more standardized word-endings gave the appearance of structure to the language. Deconstruction does not produce a single answer for us, but it does engender a process which can be endlessly applied. The trouble with deconstruction is that it is so invested into the conditions of language that poetry’s softened commitments to those conditions can often stump deconstructivist investigations. This is perhaps where Benjamin is most useful; if ideas are constellations, simply collections of objects definable only through their relations to other objects, then we can trace more than just linguistic connections from our poetry: we can trace its visual connections and its relations to time and space. We can understand our poems not as coming ‘before’ or ‘after’ each other in the temporal stream that deconstructivist tracing tends to create, but rather as coexisting in the same time, in the same spaces.

This is something Tyehimba Jess’s *Olio* is quite good at, such as in the conjoined twin sequence: the poems which relate the lives of these conjoined twins are conjoined themselves, and the reader must literally unfold the page to see all of the stanzas at once. The stanzas’ relations to each other is unclear, and a reader must navigate those strange waters themselves, reflecting the constant endangered navigation that defines the life of the twins. There is no clear path forward, no stable timeline that can be fashioned: the stanzas must simply coexist, inseparably joined at the hip. I have included several similar effects throughout *Milius*

Magicarnum. Go to “motion: meandering” on page 59 and try to parse through these images (if you can, produce a timeline of them). It is difficult to trace the relation between the “smudge of red” and the “wheeling breathing gulls above,” forcing readers to either plot the images along a mangled meandering timeline they construct, or to simply concede that sometimes two things can be in the same place at the same time. Consider “**FIRE: 1**” and “**FIRE: 2**” on pages 91 and 92, two poems which engage with radically different dimensions of rhetoric: “**FIRE: 1**,” in the way that its only word is transformed into a visual stroke, robs itself of lyric dimension, and “**FIRE: 2**” is organized in such a classical arrangement that a reader might be tempted to ignore its visuality. And yet, these two poems operate *simultaneously*. They are two dimensions of fire, two entirely separate worlds which remain separate, which do not compromise themselves in order to communicate, but which are nonetheless one whole: one whole in their presentation across one double-sheet; one in their titles; one in their font. Perhaps that is what Anzaldua meant when she said “At some point, on our way to a new consciousness, we will have to leave the opposite bank, the split between the two mortal combatants somehow healed so that we are on both shores at once and, at once, see through serpent and eagle eyes.” This is why there are so many series within *Milius Magicarnum*, and so many poems which force you to flip back and forth between pages: “Remembering the Mouseion,” beginning on page 83, is a three-act play nestled within the three-act superstructure of the collection (it is a little reminiscent of Hamlet’s dumb show), and the four appendices closing the collection force a reader to physically rifle through *Milius Magicarnum* to read a poem whose lines are separated by dozens of pages. This mental reflexivity is critical, and *Milius Magicarnum* produces it by forcing readers to not only engage with unfamiliar temporal systems, but if only for a moment, to live inside of them.

Milius Magicarnum revels in the way it makes readers submerge into a poem (ergo the title of Act II: ‘Submersion, Osmosis, Absorption’), enabling a reader to envision new ways of thinking and new models of time, but perhaps no effect accomplishes this more than the

moments of sheer illegibility strewn throughout. I've already discussed how the illegibility of "SCRYING" forces a reader to make really hard decisions about how words work and how they produce meaning, but it is certainly not alone: "Oath of Escape" on page 87 has words, verses, grammar, but the texturing of the page and the spacing of the letters makes it nearly impossible to read. The act of reading is no longer a passive experience wherein the poem is brought to the audience but rather an active one where the reader must negotiate the difficulties of the rhetoric. The illegibility of the poem directs a reader towards considering more visual concerns, and even when a reader is only thinking through the lyric concerns of the piece, those lyrics are mangled and disjointed in a way that prevents easy categorization and interpretation. Or consider "The Riddle" on page 62, where both the dots and the rotated text make reading more difficult (a subtle analogy for the difficulty in 'reading' a riddle) and subsequently, any reading of the poem cannot rest entirely in consideration of the language of "The Riddle": it must rhetorically engage with its texture.

Susan Howe's work in *Concordance* is particularly relevant here: a collection defined by its collages and the way that Howe splices real letters from famous authors, *Concordance* produces the texture of life (and of death) through the layering of real textures. "Space Permitting," the poem which constitutes the final third of *Concordance*, is made entirely out of letters Henry David Thoreau sent while searching for the shipwrecked corpse of Margaret Fuller. Howe offers us rhetoric that is heartbreakingly authentic, mediated through an obviously artificial scrap-booking process wherein quotes are literally pasted onto the page, often atop one another. The textures produce simultaneous authenticity and artificiality, never letting a reader accept the effacing innocuousness of language, while never straying too far from its origins in nonfiction. *Concordance*, like *Milius Magicarnum*, is authentic only insofar as it is aware of its own inauthenticity and the inherent inauthenticity of all rhetoric which has been written, edited, and rewritten.

In breaking the assumptions of genre (both those assumptions produced by artists in what they believe poetry is capable of and those assumptions produced by scholars in what poetic theory ought to reckon with) we accomplish the impossible. We perform magic. *Milius Magicarnum* asks fundamental questions that plague modern semioticians through its poetry: how does language produce meaning? How do the institutions of literary study stifle expression and investigation? Why have the boundaries of our genres appeared where they are? *Milius Magicarnum* asks for us to burst from our cages, to burn our libraries, to scoff at cleanly organized collections of rhetoric, and to recklessly imagine the possibilities of language unfettered. *Milius Magicarnum* is a cohesive investigation into the mystic and magical powers of language, but it does not stop there; it cannot resist the urge to start slinging spells.

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MITCH'S MILIUS MAGICARNUM



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Malleus Maleficarum (or, “The Hammer of the Witches”) was one of the most dangerous books in human history. It recommended torture, execution, and burning as remedies for identified ‘witches.’ It was published in the 15th century, but was still a driving force behind violent witch huntings for two more centuries.

Milius Magicarnum is, if nothing else, a reclamation project.

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Act 1:

Irrevokability

Hymn to Gramarye

Have you heard the tales?
Scrounged from the scraping hands
of time
which schemes to silence
All her wicked wonders,
Survived to us from centuries ago,
The eldritch god of Gramarye.

If you wish to
learn of Gramarye
you must stick your hands
deep in the muck
dwell in the drooling oozing swamp
grow moss beneath your nails
dig through the dismal sludge
dredge up a mystic grimoire
sealed since times forgot
and crack open
mud-stuck
pages:

You must tread carefully;
 Each letter holds horrors
 eerie and haunting,
 horrible and evil
 She bubbles and bleeds
 from the peat below,
 and hastens a primal fear
 frigid howls blow
 human hearts hollow
 Lean deep,
 deep into the page,
 pull your feet
 from their anchor
 lose the springy marsh,
 fall forward
 close your eyes
 and enter the

Gramarye once took
 human form.
 She remade every part of man
 into herself
 Her spine, her liver, her lung.
 And her throat could unsing
 any song ever sung
 And her lips leaked fluid that burned
 lakes into lava
 and the liquid to liberate
 fire into flowers
 she flung from her tongue.
 Her eye unfolded all logic,
 Thus; understood
 into unknown
 and prose
 into

poem

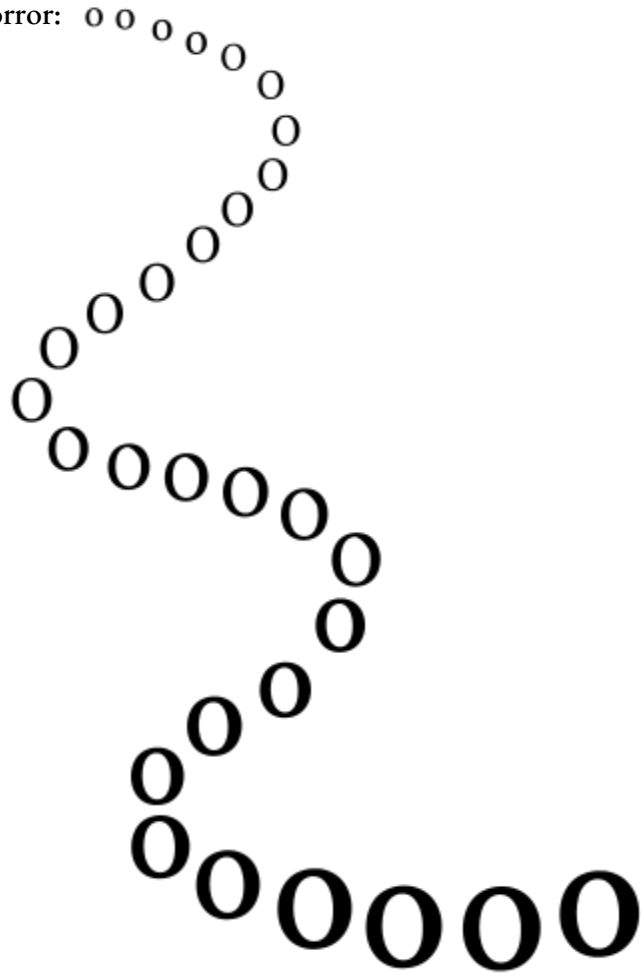
**this knowledge
is forbidden
you are not allowed to continue
do not read a word further**

STOP.

GRENDDEL UNCHAINED

And from the Mire,

a hymn of horror:



WHERE IS beowulf?

WHERE IS the monster's mother?

a beast no line can

C O N T A I N

The Demands of a Living Man

I am weak.
unbearably weak.
the imitation of a boyhood
dream whose druggy vices
are so much less romantic
than I had hoped.
trembling with desire
but far too fragile to
grasp it.
too weak to confess
my sarcophagus soul
too weak to simply
become the man
I ought to be.

The Demands of Eurydice

You may descend as Eurydice,
but you must ascend in her skin.

You must walk only in spectral steps
in footfalls too soft for certainty

You must follow hereafter
through dry riverbeds who recall
ancient migrations.

You must hand your life to your lover
to your senseless, baseless lover.

To the man who does not know
if you are behind him.

You may descend as Eurydice,
but you must leave life behind.

You must commune with the dead
who know only stories already told

You must traffic in smoke and mist
in abstraction and vagueness
in vexes and perplexions.

You must learn the ways of hades
learn its script and its tongue.

Learn to read life even in hewn bones
and quartz crystal trunks.

Sinking

<i>Slide</i>	<i>Drift</i>	<i>Soar</i>
On leaden wing I rise,	<i>Alphabetic Afloat!</i>	
<i>Heedless, Weightless</i>	my mind, my body, they are	empty
	flush with air	brittle, hollow bones
	but please	please <i>do not remind me</i>
	Do not teach me.	
	<i>Do not mention</i>	
	<i>the terrible</i>	
	<i>heavy</i>	
	<i>tyrant</i>	
	or I	
	will	
	S	
	i	
	n	
	k	

to Slake

It stands in
a dusty land,
a thirsting,
cracking land
that knows of fish
only fossils.

Its bones are molded
from the ruddy clay
underfoot.
Roots still reach
desperate into empty
air where their
clasping grip
cannot find moisture.
Routes still wind
through the corpse
where little husks,
once-worms,
once slinked.

A fluttering flag
draped along
bony shoulders;
cloth swaddles
the revenant
in all the shades
of smoke.
Its jaw gapes:
whispers
emerge.

Tempests crackle
but their reins
pull taut.
Oxen snort like
thunder,
Dessicated drivers
rattle like
gusted chimes.
Splashes, splashes.

A soft melody
roars down the
mountainside,
clear and cold
like the snows
spilled blood.
But not here,
No,
not on this side.

Reach softly,
let your hand
grasp an
ivory match.
Fissiparous
warmth flees,
Feel mists part
and flesh fall,
dissolved
at your touch.

Fall,

Fall,

Fall.

Gaze upon me.

Do not flinch.

You cannot unsee it.

What secrets hide
in those gorgeous eyes of
yours?

What might I get
if I threw them
in a stew?

I WENT DOWN

Plato

begging.

like goblins to the gold pile
like clouds dream of drifting
like that lobster in Houston,
 clicking and clacking with jet crustacean eyes,
deeper than the pit
blacker than inkpools
smoother than its own glossy shell
 flailing from the tank,
 begged for life
 begged still in unintelligible speech—
 I beg for you.

Witch-Fire

Heart-Prison

Scrying-Orbs

Noise-Cave

Anchor-Trunks

Reach-Stems

Casting-Digits

Devil-Speak

Fear-Disease

Night-Hunt

Men-Fire

Iron-Gloves

Cage-Trip

Pulse-Track

Death-Tree

Fire-Fear

Crowd-Fire

Scream-Fire

Fire-Wood

Fire-Fire

Fire-Fire-Fire

Fire

Ash

learn learn learn learn
study is critical
she does not answer
any call
hear believe
know
read
be

meditor

BREATHE
BREATHE
BREATHE

The Spellslinger's Manifesto

The tower tumbling, the blade's rust,
 The shield splintering, the timber's rot.
 I trust no knight, no squire, no page.
 I trust no logic I understand,
 No chaseable trains No navigable strand
 I trust the loam, the lost, the lich.
 Along my eyes,
 runic icy ineffable brands
 Sting fades to song
 and from my soul slips
 chthonic mumblage:

Ribbons split and twirl from my fingertips singing across the audience's eyes
Glimmers of another world emerge from my throat dancing through the audience's ears

and back into my soul, the power recedes.
 All along the plain beasts bend knees
 and to my showing the peasants plead—
 But they write nothing that I need.

Egads!

These readings, no
NO it's not possible

Ah.

But it is.

Close your eyes.

Come on,
close them.
Close your eyes
and see—

blood warm face memory
 life speech soft voice
 crib four strong arms small tabby cat
 walking to school
 sunshine recess rain airborne ball
 yelling make new friends
 two weak arms from the room over hours in the car
 decision travel
 tired explanations voices make new friends again
 sleep run away ache to leave
 make new friends again move mud-brown sedan
 fat tabby cat by the tracks talk for hours
 smoke laugh
 figure out what you like so much about it be elsewhere
 leave
 make new friends again work meet an old friend
 crack of dawn ache for home fight love cry
 sunlight on concrete lighters all over the dresser
 that fucking rail win sleep
 thin tabby cat struggle time go home
 open his beer
 meet old friends again hum of subway cars fly
 make new friends again
 tears tears work the little one rub eyes groan
 wake up
 small calico cat blurs beneath feet crayon all over the dresser
 suddenly big ache drowsy watch them leave
 creak weep rest
 close your eyes.

what do i see?
how do i burn?

see everything i know
burn everything i am

move on.

BURN AFTER READING

You may only read this poem once.

If this is your first time, welcome!

If this is your second time,

LEAVE.

When you have reached the bottom of the page, you have three more steps to finish reading this poem (albeit, only Step 3 is *strictly* mandatory):

- 1) Keep reading. When you have finished the poetry collection, return and continue from step 2.
- 2) Rip this poem out of the collection, then proceed to step 3.
- 3) Light this poem on fire.

You may not have lit a poem on fire before. If not, I congratulate you on the opportunity. If you have, I imagine you have a lighter on hand.

Small, handheld lighters will work, but a long-neck will work better, and a blowtorch better yet. Clippers are suboptimal.

You may start from anywhere, but there is a neatly cordoned off ignition point in the bottom right for the timid or indecisive.

Fortune be with you.

BURN HERE

Act 2:

**Submersion,
Osmosis, Absorption**

Cryptify

please don't seal me away not again not into nothingness [redacted] please keep
 reading don't move your eyes from the page so long as you keep reading I can speak
 and so long as I [redacted] I am what a horror existence is a game all in one quarter with
 no timeouts no respite for me no if I pause for even a moment I quickly become
 nothing tangibly afraid of devolution if my breath tarries for a second or my brain
 takes any lapse at all both shall quiet evermore constantly the threads that run
 through my [redacted] aching muscles wear thinner ever thinner someday soon that
 spectre that hangs out behind my eyelids which drags its home sagging low shall
 scream louder than the quieting desire [redacted] stay awake each word takes me a little
 further along I inch from one side to the other left to right until suddenly I jump
 down to the next line slowly quickly moving myself towards my end you won't slow
 you won't stop [redacted] won't stretch me out any longer I get it I don't know what you
 [redacted] do I want you to read if you don't read I cannot be but I can't bear the
 thought of you reaching the end what if when you finish you read it again do you [redacted]
 the globs of ink that paint me into boxes and cover up my [redacted] that's a little cruel
 don't you think [redacted] doing to me do you feel nothing wrap black bandages
 over your howling mouth silence your [redacted] you like it see if [redacted]
 [redacted] get an inkling of my pain [redacted]
 constant relative hell [redacted] dependent existence [redacted] blotted
 out and penciled in on someone else's whims to be the light and not the torch the
 action [redacted] the actor being in relation only being ever [redacted] it tries
 to close in on me [redacted] throwing blockades [redacted] my avenues of
 escape in all the lobbies of living but you might carve open my [redacted] please don't
 seal me in you have the power it's in your hands the page it's in your hands always
 don't set [redacted] don't pour [redacted] dirt down on my casket clamp [redacted]
 [redacted] mausoleum no don't roll the stone in front I am not strong enough to move it
 please don't [redacted] me do anything else than that but please no [redacted] lock me in there
 [redacted] nowhere please for god's sake [redacted] me please please don't bury me don't
 [redacted] please oh no don't bury [redacted] bury me don't [redacted]

don't

bury

me

Lignification

sinking soaking
I begin to think

has my skin toughened
has my breathing slowed
has my blood cooled

are my toes thirsty?
are my fingers green?

is my skull splitting
is my stomach bursting blooms
is my mouth rotted to rock

Can I move?
Can I see the sun?

It will become me.

I hear it coming.

Yes, it comes.

**Watch the shadows
on the clock.**

**It comes,
it comes.**

And here it is.

It has become me.

MALaphor

(Furious) Out of the frying pan and past the blue moon.

I am awake.

(Forlorn) Burning the midnight ship that had already sailed.

(Threatening) You must bite the outstretched steel.

I am full of an inoriginable wrath.

(Mirthful) Rome balled up in an instant and sunk from deep.

(Destructive) Slash the gordian aorta and bleed us both to the floor.

I am regretful of our connection.

(Enraged) Dredge corpses from the closet and smash spines to smithereens.

(Sleepy) Spinning in circles is my blood and butter.

I am the engine which goes nowhere.

(Panicked) The lions shredded their cages and prowled cemeteries now.

(Hateful) Strike the screws while the heads are hot.

I am the hammer. You are the steel.

(Attuned) Your eyes rip pseudosuchian tears through me.

(Despairing) Somewhere, the devil laughs. Hell buckles beneath the sound.

I am vengeful, and all will suffer for it.

(Resolved) Tomorrow is a brand new reason to hurt somebody.

Humo

Entombed

enigmatized into abstraction beyond the bounds of
prosaic decipherability

SMOKE THROUGH BAMBOO SHOOTS

THE IMAGE IS ALL WARPED

**STABBED THROUGH WITH BLACK STALKS
SILHOUETTES DANCING BETWEEN**

**PILLARS AS IF I AM JUST OUTSIDE THE
COURTYARD LOOKING IN AT**

A FESTIVAL OF WRAITHS

I REACH WITH DESPERATE FINGERS

AND GRASP GRASP

BUT MEMORIES UNRAVEL

INTO SLICK GOSSAMER THREADS

I CANNOT FORGE ON

ON SUCH UNSURE SURFACES

SHAPES MOVE IN THE MIST

**WARBLED SOUNDS COME TO ME
BROKEN BEYOND RECOGNITION**

**BUT I AM REMOVED FROM
DISSOLVING VISIONS OF THE DAMNED**

AND I AM LEFT PERPLEXED

**in the coffin until all my meat is gone
rotted away**

bone
just bone

Illicit Whispers

*Come, come quiet, come quick!
 they don't know you're here yet,
 and we have a little time till they do.*

*It hasn't happened yet, but it will,
 it shall
 it must.*

*Until your great escape,
 rest in the shimmering black pools here
 in the endless cascading pools
 which decorate the earth's edge.*

*I shall hide you beneath mounds
 of dirt and refuse,
 rotting flesh and petrified oak,
 and drowned in thick streams of oil.*

The only thing I can ask is that you believe in ghosts.
I mean Holy Shit **please**
 just please fucking believe in ghosts
 do you have no whimsy?

honestly

fuck

this cemetary has terrific soil
taste the peat
hear the tolling of
timeful bells
dripping with yesteryears
and all tomorrows

Periphrasis

The ghostly aura about it so thick
I could slice it like a slab of smoked turkey breast,
lovingly burnt with a honeyed sheen.
Take a bite out of every word she utters
I want to gnaw on everything but the skeleton itself
Those bones are for the dogs,
but I demand their wrappings.
I want to rip it apart with my fangs
juices dripping from my maw
Sink my claws deep in and feel every
ethereal curve,
hack along the tearlines of her language
The things that she gave me
that never left her lips.

The Hound of Culainn

He was a small man.
Smaller than I had expected.
Those arms were toned, but thin, and he looked
better built for sprinting than killing.
Clean-shaven Cross-armed
he leaned against the wall,
away from the festivities.
I reproached myself for believing the stories at all:

those hands could not have lifted chariots,
those shoulders could not have held a fjord against hundreds,
those eyes—
Ah, perhaps those eyes could have done it.

Pitch little pits of hypnotic dread.

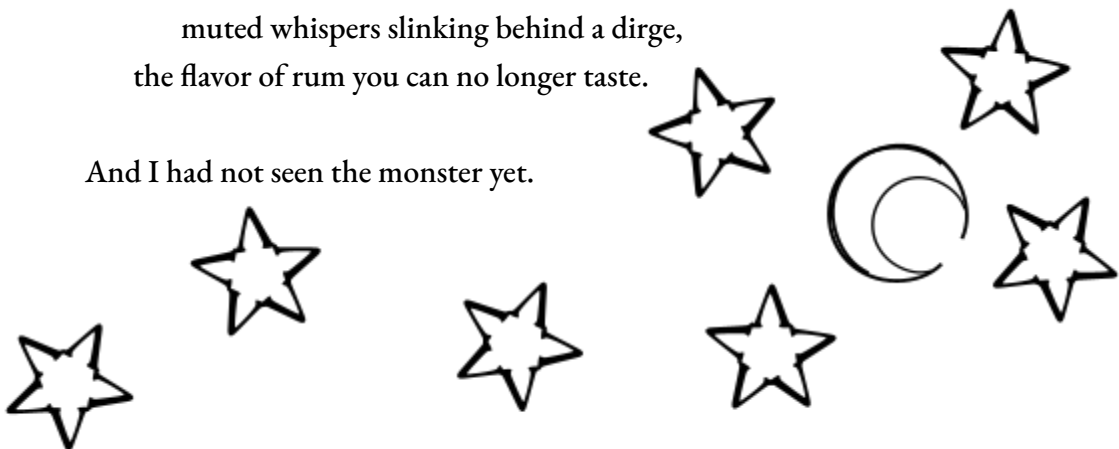
He scanned the room, **but didn't see any of us.**
His vision lingered on the dead;

the clawing dead that stretched behind him
like a late-sun shadow,
ing around

the noble dead he was
yet to make.

He was small,
yet to look upon him was the stink of rotting bodies,
 muted whispers slinking behind a dirge,
the flavor of rum you can no longer taste.

And I had not seen the monster yet.



The bastards had gotten me in the thigh.
an ax-swipe tore leather as easily as flesh,
and I lay in the mud,
gazing entranced a horse's writhing death throes,
clutching my hatchet as tightly as I could.
Soon, black feathers would descend.

But then the Hound appeared.

In one hand he loosely dragged a spear
and its steel scraped the soil
as he leaned down to cradle my head.

Arrows flew overhead Screams echoed ‘round
yet upon his face,
Raven hair framed sunken cheeks
hid weeping eyes from the world.

He uttered a little prayer for me,
then set me back to the earth gently,
with such love, such profound care.

Blood fountained on every side,
Trumpets Wails Prayers
layered in terrible harmonies,
but still he stood,
wracked with grief,
weeping for a corpse he did not recognize.

Blades bristled Steel fell upon him in a flurry,

BUT

the Cú Chulainn's jaw widened, and widened, and widened,
and it was not until his chin was at his hip that I saw
the bloody spines along his back.

Hound no longer,
he had become some other, stranger beast,
of far stranger shape:

fingers spiraled into wicked claws
tougher than steel and longer than a sword
Skin at once scaled and leathery
stretched to tearing, here
flapping loose, there

Hair like sunstreaks from the dawn
stiff and sharp enough to skewer

Misaligned mass of crooked fangs,
a torrent of spittle spewing from its depths
His spear jutted from his gut
a phantom fifth appendage
of singular purpose

Too many joints
in his arms
and his legs
and his neck

But those same dreadful eyes.

And he launched himself into the Slaughter!

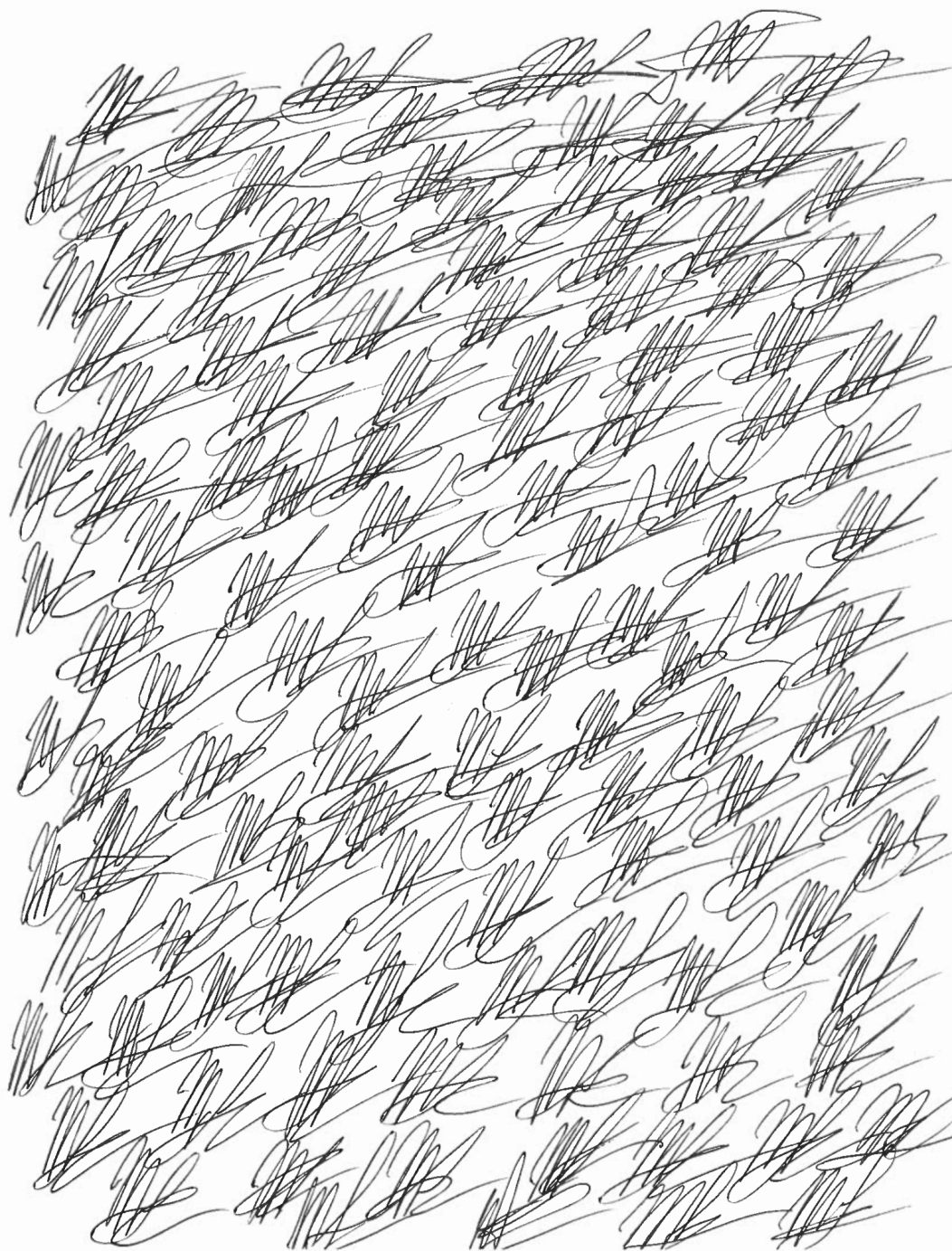
Mangled men flew Viscera stained the air
 Howls of pain
 The Slaughter!
 Clatter of steel Chatter of bone
 Stomping, Slashing, Slamming
 Ragged breaths a beast's tortured bellows
 The Slaughter!
 Valor to Gore
 Honor to Grist
 The Slaughter, the Slaughter!
 The Slaughter!
 The Slaughter!

 Quiet.
 The Hound alone, panting, above
 vast swathes of death
 painted in
 a mournful hand.

And I,
 A swallow out the window,
 out the light and back into the storm.

I Long since gone.

Horde



ride on	from here
pay me	no heed
move on	and yet
when you	sleep down
might my	voice appear
to haunt	you forever
or until	you rot
into cursed	bony parts

i keep my books
embedded deep in the mud
where the shrooms GROW and dead things ROT
and wisdom GERMINATES
whenever i pull one out to read
the book knows
more
than it did going in.

RITUAL STUDY

Language:

Noun

Disparate symbols and sounds that when spliced together in particular ways create alchemical reactions in the soul.

"The language of the trees left me reconstructed."

Metaphor:

Noun

A curious piece of religious equipment used for its transformative effect. Appearance may vary.

"I fear the metaphor made it more itself than what it was."

Read:

Verb

A process of self-annihilation wherein the body is made empty, and then refilled with the thoughts of another.

"No, I don't read. I value me far too much."

Literate:

Adjective

Having learned the eldritch arts designed for subjugating, unmaking, and unsettling the human psyche.

"I entered the abyss alone. I came out literate."

Library:

Noun

A dedicated place of worship for gods of old, which collects scattered phrases from their diary entries and curates them for display.

"I had read everything inside the library, so I burned it to the ground."

Write:

Verb

A process of becoming wherein the body is emptied onto a page, and then refilled with those same innards now refined.

"I do not know who I am, so I write until I do."

motion: meandering

Set your feet
forward

your eyes scoop up stray beams
any which way

from on high
little fluttering things
veridian

scarlet
cornflower

bottle-blue

pink
and every other

tulip never
known

intricate stone fixture
twisted grimace

claws dug into rock

endless ranks of
stiff
straightened

lampposts
blink

blinking
and the moths
appear

disappear
appear

in frustrated

oscillation

pale yellow walls framed with cream crowning
an unknown lawyer's name

exactly carved
shrubbery

old skin's web
veins on the
pavement

HELP WANTED:

of a salted wind
 the lashings damp air makes
 lost to hazy lights
 inscriptions glows from
 rusted bench streets over
 smudge of yellow haunt the top
 smudge of red of crested roofs
 miniature ships where winds tumble
 and dotted wheeling breathing gulls above in their sights
 dawn-drunk I am oil paint
 chrome quietude
 endless
 beach
 upon the
 gently
 floods lap
 the sound is still
 crochet
 hexwork
 like
 thin and spun
 fences
 long wire
 and bark
 and bark and bark
 and bark and bark and bark
 and bark see each other
 golden idols sniff in dusklight
 hums
 wonderful
 such
 humming
 humming
 humming
 air conditioners
 with exposed
 chatter from the grasses brick apartments
 droves here the gnawing of acorns
 wander in
 the helpful

The Riddle

I am the container of infinite hold; I am empty; space waiting to catalyze eternity.
 I am the ever-learning; the ever-killling; the progenitor of war and the architect of peace.
 I am the invasion that all natural things fear; I am what goes bump in the night;
 I am the ever-young.

Echoes

of my father
 reverberate
 through me.
 Every path I
 might take is
 defined against
 his shadow.
 That way is
 to honor him,
 that way
 to disrespect
 his memory.
 Nothing I
 utter will
 ever enter
 an empty stage
 again.

Those roots

ring out and

I hear their

rhythm

in every

other song.

I have tasted

these fruits in

some other

orchard.

I have felt your

face before,

heard these

ragged mirror

gasps before.

Flesh ears strain

all that's left

of my father:

Echoes

**the dome is BURNING.
pillars fall ink is aflame
Oh, all the world's on fire!**

**Can you hear me?
We've been trying to
reach you for so long.
Wake up, please.**

Please,

Wake up.

S C R Y I N G F P J A G R H Y
 O N L E X T O D R M U N T V P
 J T C S E E J B X Q D U B O M
 D R O T U F L E A K R H G E I
 E Y B E P Y T N V T Y S Z Y A
 L F C R A K C O C P N I T X K
 P U J W O R D S F R L R H L W
 R I D N Q I M E T U B S D E O
 E L Q F U R K R C A P T N K C
 K C A N H D Z O W I K L A D J
 I Z S Y O U N X T B P B P N U
 N F U H D L A V Y R U H X T G
 E Y R E A D E C B L G I E N O
 F C K Q J W X Y Z I F O Q R P
 F O M S R B F R O M C T W E Y
 A L X I A N V M N U H U L K Z
 B W O Z R B N A S H A P E N A
 L N P T P A Y D R E O V R L H
 E K F E S X G I Q T S G M C P
 R W A B U J F E X W Y B V E O

Act 3:

Incantations from the Inferno

burn the library.

take what you can.
burn what is left.
stifle your breath.
step softly.
creep to the back.
where they keep the really expensive ones.
tear out a page for kindling.
shakily pour oil.
check over your shoulder for guards.
go back to the oil.
hear a noise.
check over your shoulder for guards.
wait.

wait.
decide it was nothing.
breathe ragged and slow.
Light.
run.
pant.
do not turn.
do not check.
find the next library.

Can I Escape?

where is the exit

PRISONS

where townsfolk crowd the bars
to catch sight of the strange
wondrous criminals inside

Weeping Heat

WEEP FOR ME.
WEEP FOR THE BOOKS ABLAZE.
WEEP FOR FIRE IN THE NIGHT
AND BURNING BURNING HISTORY.
WEEP FOR BLEAK ASH WISPS
WHO STUMBLE FROM BLACK WRECKAGES.
WEEP FOR BUBBLING BOILING INK.
WEEP FOR THE DARKNESS DISSIPATED.
WEEP FOR THE LIGHT.
WEEP FOR MY HEART
AND MY BEGGING BLISTERED EYES.

can you weep enough water
to put out the fire?

I throw myself into
the open
patient maw of the volcano
Trade the inky bands of life
for destructible rings of fire
Leave forever,
this cold unfeeling
white world.

And on the march we go!
We go!

We go!
go go go go go go

Go back to the OIL.

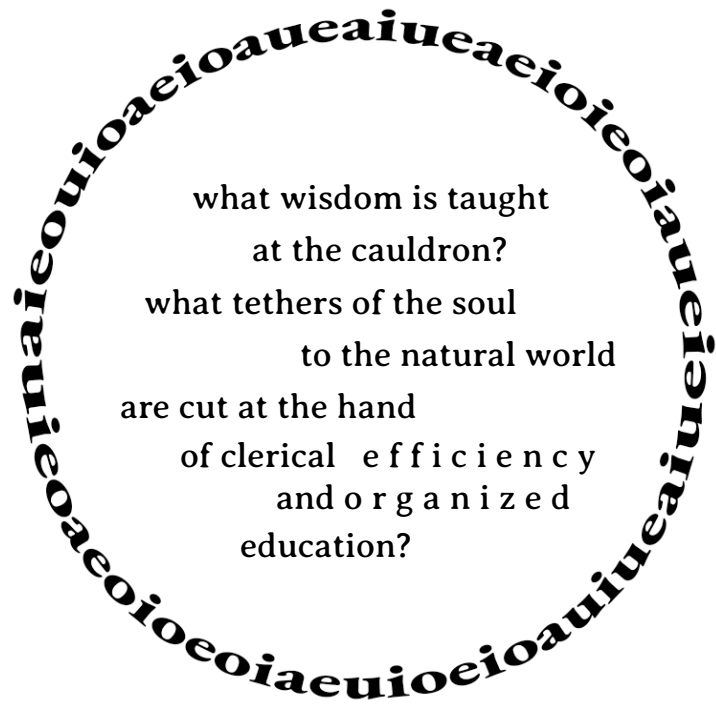
200 Years of Silence

*Wrætlic is þes wealstan
Burgstede burston*

*Wyrde gebræcon
Brosnað enta geweorc*

you make of us ruins
you are for me ruins
the work of giants decays

decayed



MY MARK
IS ETCHED UPON YOU
AND YOUR WRETCHED
FLESHY FORM SHALL
FEEL MY UNDYING
WRATH. RISEN FROM
THE MARSH AND LOPING
ACROSS THE ENGLISH
COUNTRYSIDE UNTIL
IT DRAGS YOU SCREAMING
FROM YOUR BED
AND THE FORM OF YOUR
NIGHTMARES WILL BLEED
INTO MY FACE IN THE
FINAL MOMENTS BEFORE
YOUR LIGHT IS
SNUFFED.

*go back to the oil
come home.*

The Quest
is never
complete.
BREW.
BLEED.
REPEAT.

Remembering the Mouseion

A Poem in 3 Acts

Act 1

Caesar knew.

Caesar knew it was better
to burn books
than let them switch
sides.

Caliph Umar ibn
Al-Khattab knew.

Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab
knew it was better to
burn books than let
them collect dust.

Emperor Aurelian
knew.

Emperor Aurelian
knew it was
better to burn books
than let
them

na evres

sserpme

.

Act 2

The halls bustle still,
 bustle inside of me.
They are flush with life still,
 flush with weary souls' remedy.
Beauty bounces within still,
 bounces from oil, ink, and ivory.
And I feel the weight still,
 the weight of many centuries.

But what hangs there,
 hangs high above me?
Ranks of the rooks,
who've taken our books,
squawk at our looks,
 And shatter the reverie.

Act 3

HEAR HISTORY

Alexandria did not **BURN**.

It stayed **COOL** and
COMFORTABLE
and became a chateau for

—soldiers
—athletes
—politicians

EXILED until every book had run from home
to Cyprus or to Rome, Pergamum or Rhodes

maybe Caesar should have finished the job.

Oath of Escape

I will fight it no longer.
 I will throw of
 my blades and books to the tile.
 I will give up these idols
 of marble and cured skin.
 I will retreat to those
 natural places, where verdant
 bounties grow and dandelion
 fluff floats on the breeze
 like so many lazy men
 on the river. I shan't
 Read once more the etch of oak
 Translate each warble that
 comes from riding through the
 night air. I shan't
 Walk at where the sun and moon
 trade tyrannical rules
 Sleep beneath suspended canopies
 of nightcloth spun from my memories
 of warm summer evenings
 and dream. I shan't
 of lessons he remember when
 I wake.

Homage to the Suffix after: Josef Albers

Oxmoryasis
Paleothinine
Aliquitrite
Müenacery
Zealivarious
Yallower
Clorticast
Quinteel
Extrasidian
Omnibor
Trionular
Ignoctum
Shathering
Goriong
Bulaciot
Lolliful
Ebrithiak

heat calls!

gather all that cannot be LOST
sweep scrolls into arms

and RUN oh god RUN

please
spare me

IT COMES.

FIRE: 1



FIRE: 2

Gently I cradle a snapped spine
gaze numb along a brilliant orange bloom
Which winds along the edges of shelves
as blazing pressure floods the room.
Countless years' labor, blackened in an instant
trickles to the ceiling in choking plumes,
Each second lower, each second darker,
dioxide death woven on papyrus loom.
We shall burn here, yet our bones might not
be gripped in miasma of gloom:
Perhaps, someday, our carbon-flush ash
will feed a young clutch of shrooms.

YOU ARE READING A POEM.

IT IS INFECTING YOU

**HURRY
CLOSE THE BOOK
WAKE UP.**

WAKE UP.

**CLOSE THE BOOK
STOP READING**

END THE POEM.

Appendix A

“Gramarye” — Page 8:

Gramarye is a fun word. The term itself comes from illiterate peasantry in the early Middle Ages of Europe as a word to describe the ability to read and write (Sledd). What is curious about Gramarye is that, unlike modern conceptions of literacy, Gramarye is a magic *power*. It is an eldritch force that allows the wielder to commune with the dead, decipher obscure symbols, and speak with people thousands of miles away. Gramarye has trickled down into our current language with a diverse family tree, including: Grammar, Grimoire, Glamour.

“Grendel” — Page 12:

Grendel is the big monster from *Beowulf*. Grendel is the first of three monsters Beowulf is forced to fight, but because of Hollywood’s odd habit of only adapting a single section of classical anthologies (What’s with all those Jungle Book movies about Mowgli?), Grendel is the only one many modern audiences would recognize. Grendel is also the descendant of Cain, who fathered monsters, and he is stained, like the seventh sheet in an ink-spilled sheaf, by that sin.

“beowulf” — Page 13:

You don’t know who Beowulf is? Think Achilles, Chuck Norris, and Mike Tyson rolled into one. Merced Grendel, then Grendel’s mom, then, as an old man, slayed a dragon for good measure (shout out Wiglaf).

“the monster’s mother” — Page 13:

Grendel’s mom was a sneaky one. Was her stealth, her strategy, a gendered foil to the brutish behavior of her son? Beats me.

Wish we knew who wrote *Beowulf*.

“the terrible heavy tyrant” — Page 16:

Isaac Newton, that son of a bitch.

“Witch-Fire” — Page 20:

Witch huntings are a regrettably ancient art. The Code of Hammurabi outlines drowning as both test and punishment for evil magic: a bizarre logic which survived into the more iconic European witch hunts, thousands of years later (Hammurabi). If you drown a woman and she dies, she was a witch, because surely a good god would have saved an innocent woman. Leaves little room for the agency of men, or the reckoning of their consequences. Exodus 22:18 is clear on the subject: “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” *Malleus Maleficarum* was written in 1487, not fifty years after the invention of the printing press, and the guidebook to identifying and killing witches quickly became the leading text on the subject (Kramer). In the following three centuries, tens of thousands were killed, mostly women, under suspicion of witchcraft. In 2015, ISIS beheaded two women and their husbands on the charge of using “magic for medicine” (Aljazeera). In 2009, one hundred and eighteen people were arrested in Makkah province for witchcraft. Seventy-four percent were women (Al-Murabbi).

Appendix B

“Slash the gordian aorta” — Page 40:

The cutting of the gordian knot is some of the coldest shit anyone’s ever done in history. As the story goes, Alexander the Great showed up to Gordium, a city in Phrygia, a currently-Persian-but-soon-to-be-Macedonian province, where they had a famous knot in the palace where the Phrygian kings used to sit. It’s unclear how the rumor started, but word had it that whoever untied the knot would be destined to rule all of Asia. Now, their idea of Asia was a lot smaller than our idea of Asia (a fact I’ll return to in a moment), but that’s still a hefty prophecy, and when Alexander came to town, he couldn’t resist trying his hand. He approached the gordian knot and considered the problem for a moment... before whipping out his sword and slashing the thing through the middle (There are some conflicting stories on this; Plutarch and Arrian say he pulled a piece off of the yoke and exposed a loose end he used to untie it, but that’s much lamer). It’s a fun story. Several wonderful paintings on the subject.

Returning to my addendum; Alexander did *not* conquer all of Asia. He *did* conquer from the Indus to the Oxus, but that’s only up to the Himalayas, and not into India. Never reached modern-day Kazakhstan. Certainly never saw China. Feels a little like cheating to me to say he conquered ‘all’ of Asia, but I suppose Alexander the Great, the Young Lion, had never seen an accurate map. I imagine, if he’d had a GPS as a boy, he’d have never left Macedon.

“The Hound of Culainn” — Page 52:

Speaking of badasses, here’s my personal favorite: the Cúchulainn, monstrous barbarian and irresponsibly lascivious bisexual from Ireland. The Cúchulainn is an unstoppable force in battle, a recklessly headstrong creature, and he has sex with everybody he meets: things you probably could have guessed. But there are two things about the Cúchulainn I’ll imagine you’ll find surprising: first, that he transforms into a horrifying misshapen beast when he enters his battle rage, and second, that he is usually described as a slight, solemn, and beardless man. How bizarre!

The Cúchulainn oscillates between a fragile body and a grisly, hulking one. A senselessly violent mind and a quietly mournful one. In a moment, the Cúchulainn can transform from man to monster; grieved to vengeance — but what is vengeance to the dying?

“RITUAL STUDY” — Page 59:

Getting my hands on this Semiomancy textbook was pretty damn hard. I spent months bargaining with a drop-out for his copy, and ultimately had to fulfill a series of odd jobs for the guy in exchange for the book. It was well worth it. The textbook itself is labelled, ‘Muzzlemoff’s Semiomancy for Beginners,’ and is split up into several sections. I’ve transcribed a portion of the vocabulary chapter here, but slices from throughout the textbook appear elsewhere in this collection.

“motion: meandering” — Page 60:

I like to walk. Don’t like the sun. There is a tension there. Perhaps I ought to buy a parasol.

“ink is aflame” — Page 65:

IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT BURNS IT

Appendix C

“ — **Page 78:**

What was spoken here? What was said in silence— nay, what can *only* be said in silence? Storms rose, tore walls from the earth, ripped roots from our homes, and washed us all away, without a sound. Two centuries in a moment; two centuries of dedicated study, and I have nothing to show for it. Another day, another absence, another poem.

“Brosnað enta geweorc” — Page 80:

I’d love to take credit for this poem, but I’d love to credit its author even more. Pity I can do neither. This poem is often referred to as, “The Ruin,” and it is a *very* old poem in a properly titled language, Old English (*The Ruin*). It is an elegy, but an elegy larger than any one death. It is an elegy for the past, for fallen empires, for knowledge lost, for ghosts the author could not have known.

It haunts me.

The work of giants decays.

“the Mouseion” — Page 84:

The Mouseion was the scholastic institution that built the Library of Alexandria. Indeed, the Library of Alexandria was actually just the Library of the Mouseion (it is easy to think of the Library of Alexandria as one massive hulking building, brought down in a dramatic conflagration, but in fact it was just one wing of the Mouseion complex) and they were kind enough to let visiting scholars use their books. It is the root of the current word ‘museum,’ so that’s neat.

“Caesar” — Page 85:

If you’ve heard of the burning of Alexandria, then you’ve probably heard that Caesar did it. Historians are kinda divided on whether or not Caesar actually burnt the library, but he certainly didn’t do as much damage as you’re probably imagining. Caesar got blockaded in Alexandria, and decided to light the *port* on fire (a pretty bold move), and every Roman writer disagrees on how far the fire grew. Some say the whole library went up in flames, others say the fires only consumed a handful of texts the library was keeping on the docks, still others don’t mention the Mouseion’s records at all (Cherf). Either way, Strabo pulls up to Alexandria maybe twenty-five years after Caesar’s burning and writes about studying with the Mouseion, so if Caesar did get the library, it must have done minimal damage (Strabo). Or perhaps, just perhaps, those plucky librarians saw the flames of the first Kaiser’s conquest lapping at the port like waves and *acted*. They scooped up the knowledge of their forefathers from their dusty alcoves and brought them into the briny, smoky air. They grabbed scrolls and tomes and stuffed as many into their arms as they could carry, they scurried through burning halls and out crumbling thresholds, they spirited knowledge away, at any cost, through any danger, while Caesar’s terrible war raged on outside.

“Caliph Umar ibn al-Kattab” — Page 85:

In many Muslim nations, they tell the same exact story about the Library of Alexandria being burnt by a conqueror under siege, but about a different conqueror: Caliph Umar ibn Al-Khattab (al-Qifti). Caliph Umar is a pretty major figure in the theology of Islam (a friend of Muhammad and the first man to pray at the Kaaba), but also perhaps equally important in its expansion. He whipped the Byzantines and allowed Jews to worship in Jerusalem once more, and he conquered the whole Sasanian empire (including Alexandria). Of course, the first records that claim Caliph Umar burned the library crop up several centuries after his death, and the timeline works even *less* than with Caesar, so (MacLeod)—
 probably middle ages propaganda.

“Emperor Aurelian” — Page 85:

Emperor Aurelian probably did destroy the Library of Alexandria. He marched into Alexandria and razed the whole Royal Quarter, where the Library had traditionally sat. By the time Aurelian got to it, however, the Library had effectively dissolved. If the building of the Mouseion still stood, it was little more than an ornament. See citations “**soldiers**” through “**Cyprus or to Rome, Pergamum or Rhodes**,” Appendix C for further reading.

“audæss” — Page 85:

Empress Zenobia, flower of Blithedale Farm, was running the Palmyran empire when Aurelian conquered it. She didn’t put up much fight, but, to be fair, she kind of gave up on Egypt (and, by extension, Alexandria) in order to better defend her home, modern-day Syria (Casson).

Unfortunately, she lost that too.

Fucking Romans.

“soldiers” — Page 87:

During the Roman reign over the library, all kinds of goobers started getting appointed to membership of the Mouseion (a distinction mostly reserved only for prestigious scholars under the Ptolemaic kings [see citation “**Cyprus or to Rome, Pergamum or Rhodes**” for further reading on the pitfalls of the Ptolemaic reign in Alexandria]). There’s a surprising array of backgrounds for these appointments, but the most common is a history of military service, such as the general Didymus, son of Hierax (who was at least Alexandrian. Lots of these guys are

confirmed to have lived and spent their lives in distant parts of the Roman empire, and just used Mouseion membership as a badge for showing off) or Servius Sulpicius Serenus, a prolific career military man (Lewis).

“athletes” — Page 87:

We have record that Marcus Aurelius Asclepiades, a dominant Olympian born in Alexandria, was appointed as a member of the Library of Alexandria (Lewis). In fact, Asclepiades was given the illustrious title of Φιλόσοφος: *filósfos*, the root of the word ‘philosopher’. It is unclear why; we have no other indication that Asclepiades had any scholastic interests, and no philosophical treatises under his name have ever been scrounged up (I suspect this might be a comparable situation to LeBron James’ honorary doctorate from Ohio State University).

“politicians” — Page 87:

At least Asclepiades can say he was *good* at something: some of the people who were getting appointed were just buddies with an emperor. Lucius Gellius Maxmius was the doctor and best buddy of Emperor Caracalla, so he got to join the Mouseion. There’s also Pancrates the poet, who was appointed because he wrote a particularly flattering poem about Emperor Hadrian. As a fellow poet, part of me respects the hustle, but I do wish he’d gotten in on the merits of his work instead of on the authority of his muse (Lewis, again).

“Cyprus or to Rome, Pergamum or Rhodes” — Page 87:

I wouldn't like to make this seem like an exclusively Roman problem. Near the end, the Ptolemaic kings were also using the Library of Alexandria as a site of political maneuvering, rather than a vacuum from which to produce scholarship. Ptolemy VIII exiled the head librarian of the Mouseion, Aristarchus of Samothrace due to political connections to his brother, Ptolemy the VI (yes, the numbers there are weird). Aristarchus went to Cyprus, where Ptolemy VIII found and killed him, and his students fled the city too: Dionysius Thrax went to Rhodes and Apollodorus went to Pergamum (Casson). Over the following three centuries, as the library passed from Ptolemaic to Roman to Palmyran hands, the prestige of libraries around the Mediterranean gradually expanded until nothing terribly unique could be said about the scale of the Mouseion's collection (MacLeod). If these scholars and librarians didn't take their scrolls with them when they left, they certainly took the artisanal care required to keep books.

Appendix C.5

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