

Polylogue

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by

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E·RATIO

Polylogue

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for my sister

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Slant-Light Felix Suite

As from a true sky, it is made

in the garding memory
of home
the grinding bowl
in sympathetic powders, elixirs of faith
tincture of holding and what is held
to be the case, to be sure, in place
as it is folded back into
your specific gravity
your knowing return
from this,
unmappably thus

Here, then, was one house
pencil sketched at one remove,
from hallway dust to mirror
silver in certain dim
modulations of trust

if that's what we want it to be,
wish it, thereby, to have been

There are your books of field work,
the watercolors that washed through
afternoon fogs, retreats, odd music.
Here are the water towers that
broke my theoretical heart exactly along
the fault lines.

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And this was no simple truth,
was no truth at all, really: held together
with plaster, candle wax, or
shoe strings tangled in some
fervent investigation of
the hallway
the dust,
the mirror
the screened porch with
the hydrangea just outside

Felix wants to believe in the prophetic properties
of certain visions he's been having, like the one
just this morning in which a version of himself,
he supposes, approaches a wall (or is it a canvas?
a page?) and writes:

“All Felix's endings are happy ones.”

To be sure, this will have some odd resonance on the street
where our man is somewhat known as a purveyor of grim portents
and decidedly not known for speaking plainly
or even comprehensibly about the given world.

He considers his dreamed words as one might
search for a curve in the evidence of a straight line,
or as so many have imagined reveries to conceal
important truths, relations that dramatize their own falsities.

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This is precisely the kind of portentous moment he has tried to write before or, in any case, the kind he has tried, with mixed success, to write about.

And it is the impulse to sort out that distinction that moves Felix's eyes to the pattern of veins running through his hands, the texture of his skin, a vague shadow somewhere overhead, his endings, his paint, his pen.

Will you be in my opera?

You are the logic of my soliloquy, my sonnet. And I have here some new lines to free the old from their strange commitments, their loosely strung promises. When Charles Bukowski died, I was anchored to a zero-sum game theory, a predicate of misdirected loves, an inventory of unclaimed modalities sluicing away to foreign shores, to opposite numbers, to a voice behind the shades in a house two streets over but with no address in my Los Angeles concomitant; the hour was late, the opera indeterminate.

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Do you believe that I have written this before?
I suppose, then, it is left for me
to open my papers to the revisions
of a time when you were not among my correspondents,
when I was Genesee or North Martel
or, yes, even the Madman Manqué of Hollywood Proper.

True, it was ever without you
or a priori,
but I improvised songs with
Alabama thematics,
and I saw a Rose Window
in a downtown church.

All the talk of an empty space

seemed to us not only fanciful
but probably seditious.
Our own paradoxes were
humiliation enough,
and, indeed we imagined
chorus lines of
phantom logicians
streaming through
half-opened doors.

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This was neither exactly
the lost memory of
some silent apparition
haunting the corridors
nor the explicit regret of
having forgotten your face
because, of course, we kept
you close
even as we watched
you vanish
into the recombinant
mosaic of others'
puzzled lives and
contingent worlds.

In the end, however,
our only true delight was
in believing you were
never gone
but only crossing,
anew,
your known
frontier.

You were never as much
the whispered construction
of my twilit story as when I,
a man of no dazzlements,
kissed through mist your
nocturne,
your vesperial similitudes
—not lips from fantasy
or prophetic rumination
or even deeply circulating rumor—
but your inversions
of sky and ground,
your projections of keeping,
your mosaics of magnolia where
our roots converged, entangled,
and pushed upward from purple
toward the provisional moon.

Felix is having some second thoughts about the way this prose poem looks, not so much about how it reads, to say nothing of what it might all add up to, but its aspect is problematical. Indeed, its aspect ratio is altogether contrary to what he wanted to accomplish here, which was something else troubled him, finding a project, finding the right project: an open letter to career solipsists; a thought experiment in which contemporary “types” become the creatures in a kind of post-modern bestiary (should he include The Mother? The Last Woman?), and a defense of verse (not this one) written in bed. For all these projects, Felix is deploying his new alterity machine, his puppet Other. He is doing this to test the claim that some others are Oneself, which is to say: one’s Self. At the same time, it amuses him to name him “False Felix,” probably hoping to invoke the False Florimell from *The Faerie Queene* or, somehow perhaps, to suggest that he has read and understood all of Paul Ricoeur’s *Oneself As Another*. In fact, he has not. Of course, the difficulty on all these counts begins when he reminds us that this very prose-poem is of uncertain authorship, was conceivably written by, is possibly being written by that same False Felix. Descartes, in despair over his daughter’s death, is said to have commissioned, in the likeness of his daughter, a working automaton, which he kept in his home and which he loved. Perhaps then, what Felix has here, despite his attempts to ruin everything with speculative self-reflexivity, is the working likeness of a prose-poem or, in any event, the puppet Other of one, struggling in unfamiliar company to say the correct lines, to laugh at the appropriate moments, to figure out how loves feels, what the sky wants, whom to believe, whom to doubt, and, when waking, how to look surprised.

I want to believe you are the Self
that I have imagined I should be.
And I know that the names of things
are not the same as the things they name.

So, I am wondering if you wouldn't mind
going out into the world for me today, that is,
going as me, in my place,
moving through my spatial coordinates,
eating what is mine, spilling through my face.
I am interested in knowing
what is going on out there:
how it happened,
what is being said
and what is being done about it.

I saw you standing in the hall last night,
looking at yourself,
myself in the mirror,
and it occurred to me that some recourse
to the philosophy of mirrors
might be instructive here:
they tell us very little
as they are vast, even infinite fictions,
and are epistemologically, you know,
inconclusive.

But I said nothing, afraid you would ask:
“What do you mean by that?” Of course, I never know,
which means all my answers are, you know,
unsatisfactory.

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Last night I saw something unfamiliar in the mirror.
And I wonder if you might take a look:

Look at me.
Now, look away.

Felix with Fire Code

And whom do you think but Felix Omega himself
is among the crowd watching Bibb Mill—
the last subsidiary and artifact of a textile-industry franchise
here in Columbus, Georgia—burning now splendidly into
spiral night.

Concentricities of flame and brick, shift inward
as if toward some originary purpose, a secret and essential enterprise
conferred on moments of failure, entrusted to forgotten places.

Traffic is subsumed in the dream
of its own inflections, strict frames of faces
illumine a Promethean harrow of
shadow vaults in the glyphic splines.

Under bridges, the mad and derelict
suspend their vague border disputes,
to watch and to see
what endings look like,
how things become final.

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Felix himself will tell friends that the end, strangely, never came:
that the real structure seemed to emerge from the fire,
high arches rising to
incompleteness and self-reflexive jests,
columnar plinths driving through shattered rock.
And yes, he anticipates all the cynical chatter
about Phoenix ashes or recoverable provocations.
But the brick he will have found
in the ruin, and keeps
for himself,
neither myth
nor theory,
is heavy
and is hot.

Felix, canning

I am thinking here of
quiet in your sky, of
UFOs out over Highway 0
and these styles of trust we forge
in the names we forget.

I am hoping here for
some sense of proportion and a
language for disclosing the complex
mathematic inside my glass, outside my memory,
this late-summer ice sluicing away across
my table to some troubled province.

I am wondering here how much of
this could be
discarded without risking a false irony
or the humiliation of a premature
transcendence.

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What, then, to do about your quiet sky,
these unmappable traces, and derelict objects of art
Of course, we could identify them and count them
and let smarter people explain them (that's what I do),
but what will have been our solution here
with all this odd light, these accretions of evidence,
these embarrassing empirical dreams?

I am thinking here of
something my mother said
about blessings, about autumn,
about knowing which fruit will keep.

Felix Dreams of Two Saints and a Haint

Your home is built with fragments
on a substrate of anorexic dolls
or are they emissaries from the older
way of doing things?

You have said that tradition would require
systems of rain and oracles and then, just as quickly,
no more, please, we do not understand a word of it

Take your habituations of counting and methodologies
and pray for decent weather,
decent food,
decent rumors, at least.

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Let that cracking tableau be the harbinger of Saint Doubles,
my new trajectory, the final face on my vapor trail of desire.
It is as one and two will have been the numbers of the eaten,
the structure of a geometricity, a system this time of thunder storms,
predicted but not yet emergent.
And who among us will not have felt a certain urgency about the sky
in its duplicitous arrangements with chicken little with his head
cut
off and comically pursued through liturgical imposture by
Saint Lucent in his neo-logistic idiom:
faces in the vesper trails, ministerial, accusatory, inconsolable,
impenetrable, full of love.

Clarity, then, is the mission here, the daily devotional
of clean visio and Aquinas in the color field.
Everyone in attendance will recall the lessons moving
toward claims of proportio and integritas
and how lucid language spilled out from under the doll's
gossamer ball gown in a parthenogenetic flood of good will.

And still, there were those who found, who find, it all
just mysterious enough to accept without all the unsettling tropes of
responsible inquiry; let's call it a question
of decorum over
bad form.

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Double, however, remains twice the name if you see the saint,
if you say your reveries are innocent and clearly divided against
known quantities, known associations; do not further imagine that
Lucent is else or that one is madness or two is too simply written
as one or some other plus the flood water, plus the visio, plus the sky.
All you wanted was a home you built.
And that is a canvas of erasure
that will have been erased.

Seven Hills

Cermalus

Look up, Sibylline,
and do not wonder who will have been lost here.

That we read a figure transmuted by machines and fire
is only to say we were transfixed fixed by your art.

Less, we think, is known about your own designs
and upon whom dread grace will fall,

as rain on your sundial tropes.

Palatium

I found a face in the tree stump,
merely because I looked down,

thinking of Whitman drifting
through Camden in a plaza of pines.

No one heard me annotate this poem
on Screamer Mountain, which to say,

no one heard me scream.

Velia

My father's father's vision
was oracular enough to predict

late, cold summers and a vanishing moon,
the light from which shone through his skin.

In hony tonks, where no one imagined the sky
he played fiddle riffs and second guitar

and walked home singing in perfect pitch black.

Cispius

Here, then, is the Pax Georgiana
twirling as folio porn under the freeway

exit I pretend not to have noticed,
ripped out from the wet verso,

torn in to correct the recto,
false with rare errata

rotting unread like so many great books.

Oppius

Wave is not particle nor cut, stab.
Curl is never coil any more than this, that and

slice perhaps nearer to nice when pierce a peer to pop.
Chop from the head down to chunk as strings

of things that plink and plunk bend
to snapping or split open slit slipping from

my hand, heavy with Wednesday and encumbrances

Sucusa

Erinyes, you are my tongue,
all of you, and whatever you pursue,

through whom your flights' conceit
takes vermilion tincture and marbling

moves in fury's gathering gyre,
a plenum, a principle, a plenitude

capacious as the reach of open stone.

Fagutalis

Follow your words as from sleep,
your eye is sewn into the codex,

stitched in the folio of desire,
of disclosures and bonefolders

where the quire intones,
Look up, Sybilline,

and tear this paper from your heart.

Gramm(aria)

If I read you
you will have been something
oracular in my books,
a node of known things,
held out to final analysis,
held over for another week.

If I read you
you are perhaps to have understood
or it is the color of my looks
a code of what showing means
spelled out in my marginalia
spelled slowly to keep the tones.

Because I read you today
you are reading me here,
as one might imagine the lines
graphed too closely, peeled from
their numerical pulps,
consigned to notes of the foot,
how I fell through a swarm of
semicolons, readerly affectations
of le page de deux
and ink on the verso.

Now that I am reading you
and after you are thus read
I will have felt a new cut
riven through this discourse
we have made on chains of
desire and open clotures of
dim philosophy,
how I climbed through
the sound of your alarums
torwad a periodicity
but no period, no suspensions
in the verdict, no vertex in
the sentence.

Let me read you and, having been
a reader thus, I will have myself
been read or, let me mark this page
with rules and constitutive games,
with paints and gramarye
with some modicum
of my reckless trust
that the book is written out
that the book goes on
that the book is our shelter
in the modal tense,
that the book will have been
what we needed
to be

Loose Strand

This, then, is as my head is
uncoiled in some reduplicative frame
some obscure obscene name given to
rivers flowing backward to their tributaries,
fragments of dimming history
glimpsed through holes in the proof.
You are my eye in parallax, fixed to
the departing view, of that which will have been
immovable and held between shifting states,
reagent chains in unwritten worlds,
encoded somehow in the syntax
of your laughter, which is or is not
as your hands are
sharp, by your own admission
and drawn upward in droll vignettes
of caution or warning or embrace,
to correct for the splintered light,
for the familiar drift
toward magic
and noumenal improvisations.
This, then, is as my memory is
swept through auricles,
through chambers,
backward to radical concealments
and dreams of touch.

Heuristic Sequence

I will know this place by the evidence it keeps.
You will see your face through questions it does not ask.
She can find my trace in the puzzles I would not solve.
He can leave someplace and hide in the other space.
It is not the proper moment to run from the room.
We are never wrong about the hopes we fail.
You may fail enough to learn what sleep conceals.
They have come to show us how it happens.
I will leave puzzles through your wrong room.
You can solve the hopes if your sleep will leave.
She will know to have other evidence for show.
He would not ask to keep your proper questions.
It happens someplace that the trace fails the moment.
We do not hide hopes in the evidence.
You will never fail to run.
They will conceal the other face.

Personal Papers

. . . talking to the librarian about the collec
. . . calling (was this long distance?) to the Babylonian consulate
placed on hold; enjoyed, but did not recognize, the music
. . . seems to have been a shell or a sheaf or a conic section
in this part of the . . .

I am concerned here to say something cogent about *
we are having with the marginalia, indeed with the margins

We do not trust these wild experimentalists as they appear,
at best, irresponsible
and, at worst, morally transgressive

*(the problem)

. . . clearly not what I meant by that although I cannot say now just what
it was Whom do you think would follow these clinamen as if lost to
sudden walls as if proved or loved in the given trace, where moonglow
dimples the spiders' webs with fissures of secret light
Give us the dread motifs of naturalism's false vision I give you fig trees
and their milky sacks, plump with burgeoning mysteries of seed and soil
and triage to the tongue in backyards, in baseball.

. . . or could have simply eaten the pear if indeed that's what it
. . . not, in the last analysis ** to solve or resolve or to even to
contemplate
as philosophy, even the marginal, presumes to do, as it is known to
become a work

** (my problem)

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We liked speaking this way
when complexity made us feel free
and history would not move beyond
the chairs in our front room

Hark, what late theory songs
reduced to deepening folds of
evanescence and forgetting
that the past is perhaps for getting
and bringing to fallen porch swings
and these parodies of determinism.

I will have walked toward these margins
and made *** of what I could see,
structural representations of the rest,
of my own rest if I belong to the
page after this is written,
if they let me stay
if I remain

***(drawings, but I'll call them maps)

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taxis de pasa logos

