

Abstract

To the Child I'll Never Have is a lyric sequence, continuing my foray into the form which started in my first two books. It confronts the queer self's frustration with biological reproduction and questions this desire's inconsistency with his identification.

Keywords

Poetic sequence, lyric cycle, gay poetry, baby fever, gender identity

TO THE CHILD I'LL NEVER HAVE

NED PARFAN

TO THE CHILD I'LL NEVER HAVE

I.

You, breathing speculative,
held in the floating
haze, interconnected sizzles
falling from the face
of a god, raindrops

of glaze rolling golden in the astronomical
pixel,
milkless,
grasping with fingers indistinct from air
the tip of my phantom tail,
repercussion
for another day,

the light in your voice taking
light years to get here,
missing even my final
reincarnation, you are
the words' unmade flesh
not meant to twitch,

and in the temperament
of the tropics
the birds converge,
failing to identify
the shape into which
you will manifest, stone

still volcanic yet asleep, and what was absent
is uncorroborated,
what was circumstantial
fragrant, decimated into delusion,

splinters of a house
or maybe fissures in the skull

—small sparks brightening
 that dark vessel for your perusal—
warm, surfacing from the deep, surfacing
 from motives,
though I love beyond what is,
 and surrendering the words betray the wish,

some luck demanded
 in the coin flipped inside
each chromosome, carrying
 the usual blame,

or else disabuse this body of the notion
 that nature,
 deformed and imagined,
 could create you,

despite the mortal design,
 the biological defeat of what I asked
and didn't ask for,
 or just maybe out of time,

and turn to dent
 the earth with my heel.

III.

How you take the human
form, to slip
into the shape
of an infant,

to breathe air, to call
and be answered,
how it's all here,
the cooing comfort you're given,
even your name I write
into existence

under lock and key, you understand,
it's not insanity
but a question of faith—if I erase you,
would it hurt?—and what proof

of your breath,
the weight I carry in the garden,
the blinding sunlight
I shield your eyes from,
the small towel on my shoulder

in case you regurgitate the I don't even know
what's inside you, the stuff

of obsession,
how chronic

the stings, my heart
twisting each time you cry.

But the world
is soundproof

to your unrelenting wail, no one
pays attention,

the dogs don't sniff at the space I carry
between my arms,

and I am exhausted, I don't think I'm entitled
to special treatment,

I just thought that maybe bodies
should be origamis
allowed to unfold
and be reshaped,

tell me I can dismantle
the thousand cranes
circling around
the island
where you are stranded
as a wish,
turn my palm
into a compass,
my navel into a crib.

IV.

The point is to rig the system
just enough for you to slip through
the broken rules
and end up in
a lit-up little shoebox
inside me,

but of course I know better,
you are safe where you are,
intangible as the garden
we all lost and couldn't find, away
from any chance of being
mangled, run over, stabbed or deboned,

and it's just as easy without you:
when I band-aid
cuts on my feet sustained
during hyperbolized tumults
of gardening, bathe

the dogs so they won't
stink up my bed,
cuddling the happy beasts
in lieu of you.

The point is to recognize a future
by the bleakest threads on which I
trip on,
as when the carpenters
came a day early,
invaded my sanctum
to replace the sagging bookshelf and sprawled
out my shame in the living room,

every doodle, every dawdle, every souvenir,
my past spread-eagled,
unflattering episodes,
unsolicited confessions, pages both crisp
and jaundiced with age
almost shuffled together

on the floor, and it broke me,
I can't start over, sorting and arranging
the loose pages of my life,

but all this
for whom?

The point is who would inherit my books
when I'm gone,
who would hoist rebuttals
to my every catastrophe,

who would paint me red,
applaud my drab dazzle,
bloom

through the rubble
of memory, unwrap
the gauze
around my mind,
tiptoe
at the corridor
outside every
indecentcy?

The point is why avoid mistakes
when you are not here
to forgive me?

V.

Beloved
antimatter, fruit of my radical
interior, if only I

(inanimate as the object I'm holding
at the check-out line) could live a moment unfiltered
by your missing.

Having been torn to its extent,
you tear it wider: the fissure

through which moments align
to the brink
of any form of you, in my mind, if only I

(choosing between travel
and life insurance)
had a point to draw my diameter from.

Corroding rust, engine sputter, dust
and dust, sharp and deterring, the few specks

of greenspace where there still are some,
if only I (graceless and glum
over traffic) could pass this city on to you.

Not so my sorrow
could be your sorrow,
not that the city is mine to give,
but to pass on ferocity, ground
to stand on, and yes, for you to pile on

sorrows of your own collecting, if only
I (shading a rose
in arctic blue) could find your face
in every purpose.

Alert to alternatives
one absence makes,

cursing the heat when rain's
out of season, a substitute emotion
when the other goes AWOL,

scavenging for a pen when there's none in the pocket—

if only I (counting the days
till laundry day)
could stop balancing the scale
when it's pointless to offset
an empty space.

Advice of well-meaning friends:
adoption surrogate pets advocacy

but how about a dragon to scorch the earth,
how about a famine to end it all, if only I (giving up on
past-midnight dinner delivery)

could command the door
to be oblivious to your knocking.

It carries no ocean
in these parts, no anchor
for any life-in-the-making,

VI.

The mind in the womb, the child
in doubt—one
and the same event, chasing its own tail
until another music

starts. May's the month of deadlines;
thunder threatening to split the room open.

The lucid night,
contained in a little fruit. And what form

will you take tomorrow?
When you take shape, I arrest:
physics or faith.

And if I cannot breathe into clay,
I cannot be held responsible. No matter

how much time I burn
molding you into words. Wombless,

my torso once hosted a metal spike
at day, accidental
poison at night. Why should I be the one
to bring you out into the world,

when out in the world I survive on electronic

reminders? Discipline
in a deficit, a surplus of guesswork,

a string of deadlines tying me to a desk,
let this piece of cake
be the cautionary tale.

And if you manage to get here
I can only wrap you
in thin savings and rough credit, and when
I rock you in the cradle
of borrowed time, I will try to sing
the stray bullets away.

And if they ask me why my pain
is in the shape of a child,

I will tell them there isn't a shape sharper
than a small child dashing across the traffic,

nor is anything
more heart-seizing.

I, you understand,
would be the ten-wheeler on the highway
skidding to a halt.

My post-apocalyptic tub
of rocky road ice cream, my moth
with flaming wings,
my afterword,
I've kept you long enough
as contraband

in my psych exams. Wait until I interrupt
this regular programming

and I will give birth to you
in the still waters
of a drowned garden.

Your first cry will be the first music
of the new world.