Kneeling Self-Portrait

Fluencies of light dally
with olive groves, pensive
green and silver leaves reflect on
noon lies. Unlovely Nemesis loves Narcissus
forced into fruitless bloom, and visits on him
the sins of bees. Strange boy
adoring water’s nothing, shadows
water captivates: this stream

shatters glass for every stone. Mirrors
are evil, held overhead as sky.
Persephone’s heralds string their gold
and black through pollen-addled air, singing

without respite, stinging light
into food for dead gods.
He doesn’t recognize his body
has no rights, no luck with bees.
At the End of Outside

Summer opens its caesura
in the year, a pause between winter
and winter. He is more of a waiting, outline
where something almost happens

yesterday, late wind’s insomnia.
The glare outside the body is cut through
by rain when there is no rain for weeks.
Meaning happens in him every afternoon,

turning like difference or the names
of things, the hours’ long attentive
syllables brought to light, a white
mistaken for horizon. He doesn’t move,

but along the way there are birds
narrating his future as he remembers it.
He’s forgotten the word for swallow,
nightingale or any singing in the trees.

An earth utters its green everywhere,
punctuated by wildflowers and other
complementary colors, as though leaves
were too much. Things diminish

day to day, the days diminishing
toward December, the trees also . . .
Antibody

I’ve heard that blood will always tell:
tell me then, antigen, declining white cell count
answer, who wouldn’t die for beauty
if he could? Microbe of mine, you don’t have me
in mind. (The man fan-dancing from 1978
hit me with a feather’s edge across the face, ghost
of a kiss. It burned.) Men who have paid
their brilliant bodies for soul’s desire, a night
or hour, fifteen minutes of skin brushed against
bright skin, burn down to smoke and cinders
shaken over backyard gardens, charred
bone bits sieved out over water. The flat earth
loves them even contaminated, turned over
for no one’s spring. Iris and gentian
spring up like blue flames, discard those parts
more perishable: lips, penises, testicles,
a lick of semen on the tongue, and other things
in the vicinity of sex. Up and down the sidewalk
stroll local gods (see also: saunter, promenade,
parade of possibilities, virtues at play: Sunday
afternoons before tea dance, off-white
evenings kneeling at public urinals, consumed
by what confuses, consuming it
too). Time in its burn is any
life, those hours, afternoons, buildings
smudged with soot and city residues. Later
they take your blood, that tells secrets
it doesn’t know, bodies can refuse
their being such, rushing into someone’s
wish not to be. My babbling blood.
What’s left of burning
burns as well: me down to blackened
glass, an offering in anthracite,
the darkest glitter smoldering underground
until it consumes the earth
which loves me anyway, I’m sure.
Another Unclassical Eclogue

Where were you when I was for sail, 
broken love spilled on a sprawl of winter 
rocks? Pollen stamps damp gold on fevered 
afternoons, summer hands its haze of petals 
over. My body was never my property. 
I didn’t want to spare you 
anything. You ran laughing and lavish 
with sand from white combers: caught up 
with spendthrift heat. I never asked 
to spend the width of oceans drinking salt 
from your skin. Stranger with ash 
for fingertips. You burned away 
the mortal parts. I forgot the heel that bruised 
my forehead. Poured through midnights 
dripping illegible stars, if I was happy 
I hadn’t a clue. Wolfsbane, monkshood, 
demon lover’s black corsage. December 
suddenly: now I can sleep. You never asked 
my name. You answered when I called you 
archipelago, sandbar, volcanic reef days broke 
against. Sleeping with shadows 
shaped like a man, you called yourself 
bride. I took myself mapless 
through unfeatured weeks: I was never the man 
you were. You’re wrapped 
in others’ feelings like a shroud. I recognize 
that song. The song’s gone out of me. 
You never heard the words. There never
was a song. White noise played
on a puzzled radio all night. I was the sky
and you were the spire, you were
the bough and I was the cradle. I
was the apple, you were the knife.
Sing me past music this time. I never
asked for anything.
Placet Futile

long after Mallarmé

Rise up, my love. This is the unasked-for morning you must marry, some idle sunlight humming against white blinds. Here is your name, salt on the tongue, here is your face, a mirror fogged with steam: anything that can’t be clearly seen, kingdoms of unrequited clouds. You keep this absence in an amber locket, a map of years sketched on your palm: you think there are no borders there. I won’t propose the scene again.

You’d like to write something down about noon, how white notes of some motet light winds relay float weightless across an immaculate sky, how he glances and it’s summer, a picnic by the polluted river with a stranger. Singing, even.

Appoint him shepherd of these signs. When you wake among mirrors you’ll ask more than harm.
The Beautiful

incertitudes are buying shirts
across the street, shopping for another
guise, layer of gauze, mottle
across the mystery of no anyone
in any light. All power lacking

matter, gods (decoys of gods)
that approximate: ghost bodies
somewhat like men. Who wouldn’t
own such excellence, own up to damage
done already? Flushed out

of yellowed brick and stone
by attention’s blue smoke,
the visible world stumbles
into form: a grammar of wander
and spectacle sidewalks learn

from newsprint and pasted petals
that precede the leaves, flimmer
from branch to ground. To walk behind
beauty as a shadow at noon, perfected
perpendicular, is difference, sundial

gnomon’s pain (the manifest
pinned to pure principle, Mediterranean
rêve): proximate loss left in the other
life, where body arrests its tasks
to break for the last instance

but one. (Bracket this, boy murdered
in old paper, asleep across the fold’s
spoiled ink: chest open
for inspection, three-color separation
blood soiling the reading

fingertips. Bees build a honeycomb
to seal his halted-open mouth, his carrion
tongue, an eloquence of liquid light
seeps out of bloated lips the clumsy gods
have broken into.) The gods

go home alone, a lake’s
translucent body reiterates my face
in dissolve: smudge of stigma blotting
day’s remains, a surf of stuttering
stars singing I’ll never fall.