LACUNÆ
lacunae

a chapbook of poetry by noah mclaughlin

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A LIST OF ABSURDITIES

item: a list of absurdities
upon which I may nail my faith

item: a melody so elusive
for which I must fish without a net to hear

item: a pure black silence
that rises and falls with the breath of an endless night

item: candles of white flame
enclosed and obscured by a row of passing skeletons

item: a grey tombstone
photographed with color film, forgotten and preserved

item: ten thousand starving people
who keep me awake at night with their resemblance to those I know

item: circular haikus
taken down from the walls of a mad-man's cell

item: empty wine bottles
that glitter and gleam in the moonlight

item: a list of absurdities
upon which I may place myself and disappear
everyman lives in nothing
makes a hole to fill the void
pours his emptiness through it
into a waiting chasm of infinity
and that becomes ink on the page
ink as red as blood
as pure as tears
as wide as the ocean

black on black makes a lovely contrast
as i crucify my love
on the walls of Plato’s cave
& let the shadows dance upon her nakedness
watching the watchers watch her

bring me your terrible sun
let it burn away the pain
& vanquish the night of angels
to the everlasting fire
IGITUR (A DEVIATION)

igitur ga deviation

ever knowing what may be
coming or going
to and fro
in the give and take that defines
what it means to live, to dream
to speak

rolling the dice, tossing one's fate to the wind
and reading the pips like tea leaves
a less civilized manner in which the mad have for generations
read the future-fiction as they have willed it to be
for all prophesy is fiction
all fiction is desire to abolish that which is certain
that which is too bright, too clear
that which pushes us away from the single surging river within ourselves
the current of unending time and totality
that flows through each of us
rushing onward, inevitable and terrible in its brilliance
engulfing all things, for it is all things
therefore engulfing itself
the circular musings of the mad shaman
staring at the spilt entrails of his enemy
devouring with his eyes that which the past proffers up:
the living sacrifice of the future

looking back to look forward
consuming oneself in the madness of the tao
where things are so perfectly clear
that they hide forever in shadow
everybody deconstructs you online
pulling you thin and tight
like some over-used fabric that we think we can see through
as if seeing through it would give us the Truth
as if you were some kind of sieve through which
we could sift the light from the sun
that flies to us over millions of miles
just to reflect what was already there

ramble on, yes, ramble on
you masochistic angel of a by-gone age
let us trap you in digital imperfection
the analog pink noise falling to the wayside
resting like a traveler off the highway
watching us whiz by in our over-sized, over-priced S.U.V.s
because we are so busy:
rushing, rushing
rushing to the next big thing
the next big sound
the next big box-office-busting boredom
to peel off the wrapper and lick out its creamy filling
and leave it in the gutter
out of the way
to not decompose but to pollute the next guy's mid-day snack of
empty hollywood goodi-goodness

this is how the world ends
this is how gods are brought low
this is how we deify ourselves through you
divinity by proxy, immortality through hero-worship
misplacing
displacing
replacing
racing
tracing
chasing that hollowness that tears at us from the inside
that listens in sympathy to the hollowness you bare
for we are the hollow men
the stuffed men
filled with nothing but straw and lamentations
as we seek out other blind and empty souls on this new field of our existence

mclaughlin – lacunae / 5
this level plane of ones and zeroes
that may be nothing more than another tool
for those in their corporate penthouses
clinking their ice-cold glasses of expensive liquor
and laughing at how the song therein makes us hop to
yes, sir
the internet is just a way for the man to hold you down
if you let it be

because every word is a scalpel when placed against the soft and putrid underbelly
of this corporate-run faux democracy that we call home
the thing is putting it just ... there
and giving it just ... enough
and knowing just when ... to let go
let the blood flow
let catharsis take its course like flood waters
like monsoon season
like the Nile used to overflow
until they went and dammed it up

yes, they deconstruct you mercilessly online
place their razor-dull whits to building you up and tearing you down
all in that blind search for meaning that we have been programmed to perform
little social search engines
every last one of us just a Yahoo running about
gathering, gathering
gathering as much as he can before the world ends
in the divine sound of a modem screech
and the silence of solitude in the sea of everyone
ANGRÝ POETRY

angry poetry

it is times like this that you want to write angry poetry
string words along so they snap, bite and snarl
because you cannot

these oppressive cloudy nights early in march
with a full moon that defies the misty clouds
leaving the stars aching behind
when you want to turn to that lovely stranger next to you
and say “hey, let's go outside to look for stars
and talk about things that take us away from here.”
perhaps to shake your enemy’s hand
perhaps - for a moment - to hold it and say in silence
just with your eyes: “aren't you sick of all this?
the dire frustrations that gnaw at you
as you sit alone in your room
as you walk down garden paths with your lady
or perhaps a stranger?”

the frustration of not bridging the gap
of looking across a chasm so deep and wide
you could fit china in the middle
and have a few california’s yet to go
you can shout across
sometimes they can hear you
sometimes they cannot
sometimes they shout back
sometimes you stand upon a precipice
leaning dangerously over the edge
ears perked, waiting for the faintest hum
and there is complete silence from the other camp
just across infinity

you grow dizzy holding your breath
or perhaps it is just the cigarette
as you sit on an empty bench
it is an oppressive cloudy night early in march
your throat sore from shouting
the moon leering down
sometimes laughing
sometimes crying
the pen in your hand floating across the paper
writing angry poetry

mclaughlin – lacunae / 7
Harsh Whisper

poetry only comes late at night
alone in the omnipresent darkness
wrapping the shadows about me like a blanket
listening to the out-of-tune hum of the moon’s harsh whisper

that slowly resolves into a pleasant and out of kilter melody
of melancholy and meditation
and she speaks to me like she speaks to you
with a voice that has aged and matured alongside us

from youth to ferociousness to fatigue
and now together she and I and you sit back
sip our coffee and grimace behind pleasant smiles
find our strength again in the sparseness of chords dribbled out across wires and microchips

she talks of tools and their limitations
sings of pain and anger like we expect of her
with such expression that Lady Day would be proud
yes, indeed, strange fruit hangs from her lips and takes us along, you and I

what a strange trio we are in this bar
of freaks and self-expatriated exiles of the far right democrafacism that we have let take over
it’s almost a call to arms that she belabors to you and me
it’s almost as if perhaps we are truly to blame for leaving her in the trenches all this time alone

and this song has a chorus that you can hum
in your sleep that you can dance to
with two left feet but that doesn’t make it any easier to hear
when you open your ears and listen carefully

to the out-of-tune hum of the moon’s harsh whisper
that slowly resolves into the resolve to stop listening and join in
this ain’t no campfire sing along
but I’m sure that she’d like the help with the backing vocals of the million or so that we are
reversing the image making tools to deconstruct themselves
the word city is taken from the background to the foreground to the mouth the hand the finger
and used as a scalpel to dissect the lexis
the pictures on the page with letters and utterances
infused observed seemingly self-aware
Heisenberg effect upon the verses read
reaching through the surface with a device
that ripples and tears the pond displacing
the perfect fixed image seen upon the tranquil waters
touching bottom reaching the destination now obscured
observation turned permutated and distorted
refraction reshaping that which was
transformation of ink and blood the shadow play
upon the walls of Plato’s cave
relying now upon touch groping in the obscurity
of a moonless night death and shadow at your elbow
digging in entrenched in blindness
counting stars reflected in the rippling surface
FORGETTING FORGOTTEN (PIERCING THE PAGE)

the call of the empty page
heard by few understood by fewer
answered by divisions of divisions
bits of mercury swirling beneath the knives of children

obfuscation for clarity
fear of the blinding light of reason and eternity
Sam had it best wading through the mess
buried in the sand with a parasol
the Sphinx expunged from the charts
the poet of a by-gone age
forgetting forgotten verses in a dead language
reconstructed resurrected by chance
and the determination of others unknown

later Einstein and Edgar were peers in the eyes of their ancestors
ever seeking the mysticism of imagination
the key to opening the grandfather clock at the end of the universe
and stop the pendulum
and cease to be
and fall silent
back into the first sign
forgotten forgetting verses in the ever-living language
opaque to all but the solitary scribe
hunched over his desk in the twilight like a gargoyle
writing out his mock will
his ink frozen a death-grip on the pen
one hand unstoppable the other grasping the pen away

the end of everything time and again
rolling the dice singing the song
forgetting forgotten verses
erasing the erasure filling the void with vacuum
killing birthing singing silencing dying living
piercing the page
take it now one step further
direct your laser beam of a mind into a prism
and refract that intellect you use to cut down the swath of
those ordinarys that you face everyday

turn that rapier wit into a wakisashi
use it to perform seppuku
and like the good poet shaman Jim showed you
read your future in the spilling blood and entrails
foretell your death as it appears
a blinding light on the horizon
competing with the sunrise for brilliance, grandeur and horror

as that new light spills over the edge of the world
the sun's blood meeting in crimson hues with your own
mingling in a luminescent danse macabre
jangling skeletons and grim laughing corpses
reapers sweeping through the fields of humanity
each and every day with complacent smiles upon their aching jaws
glued there with the need to laugh
and laugh and laugh

for fear is the root of all laughter, Charlie said
and I think he was right
but did he take it one step further
were his verses just pretty prose put to meter and rhyme
or did he call upon the shocking rocking new world of urbana
to give us a new deadlight a new porthole
through which we might glimpse a bit of our souls
even now, even a century and a half down the line
with the train pulling away from our station at a break-neck pace
most of us left here holding our baggage
trying to decipher our ticket like it was holy writ
the last ride to paradise having left while we scratched our heads
and fumbled about in the dark for a hat or scarf
or something against the chill of the morning air

all of us holding our destiny in our hands
marveling at its beauty in the morning sun
while hues of crimson and gold break over the distant hills
like a wave like a storm
taking us one step further

mclaughlin – lacunae / 11
dream of a signless world

lie half-asleep
but still plagued by part insomnia part fatigue
the mind races through the blood and excites veins that are too tired
from carrying to and fro the necessary things
little men in little factories moving down little corridors

do not write the sunrise the sunset the captivating beauty of the trees in the twilight
simple fences that make good neighbors
a man with yellow balloons whistling far and wee
walking along with the magi and the hollow men
these avenues have been marched
their refuse swept aside now returns to play in the wind
little forgotten children in little lanes playing little marble games

it is the sign that carries that fascinates
the beauty lies therein
not the trees hold it hostage
a cold winter's morn or night with two paths is no longer the sufficient signified
but the code each signal placed one beside the other
even this is broken by floating yellow balloons
whistling far and wee
yet still all is rearranged and suggested with light and oil
murals of sounds murdered but immortal
fallen from grace to that imperfect sphere
for purchase by those who
lie half asleep
and dream of a signless world
EVENT

event

march forward to the center of the room
eyes straight ahead
think elsewhere
hold a black sack
full of what
sound of
falling
of
hitting
the floor
TEAR THE PETALS OFF OF YOU

the page cannot be displayed
keep the translation from the eyes and ears of those saner
than the singers in a chorus of lacunae
where citation is the only form of communication
and we remain hidden in shadow and amniotic fluid
static and rumblings the only discernible sounds
our signs comprised of solitary thoughts
floating in ether shapeless, soundless
mere hallucinations meditations upon their own darkness and lack
utterances without a point of origin or points of repair
to a universe that may or may not surround
obsess
repress you

marigold and lily of the valley
black-eyed susans bleeding from the casual glance of hungry strangers
blossoms of blue and amber swimming in angel's breath
keep the soil hard and learn to sing but only in discord
scold those who would disdain to reach down and gather you
for you are wild and untamable unmalleable
savage collections of simple vowels crashing with consonants
voiced and voiceless clicks and stops that contain and fix and kill the world
taking to the hunt in order to display your kill in your stomachs and laugh without mirth

dawn breaks into the middle of the night
walks along the seashore and seeks those mussels
that might make you strong might pull you down
might bring silence into being once and for all and open the world
to the endless midnight at the end of everything
where the amazons hunt their own constructors with new constructions
seeking justice in the only language they have been taught
blood flowing from the loins of motherhood
wounds alienation vengeance
all expressed and expressible beneath the throw of the dice
clicking slowly down the marble halls of eternity
tripscape
tripscape

dali landing on a cummings poem
antihistamine, diphenhydramine
exotic words for a banal disease
to soothe the unease
behind my eyes, in my throat
oranges melting into blueberries
say good-bye to captain crunch
as i march him to the guillotine
and tell him to keep blinking
keep blinking after your head is in the bread basket
the bread basket is a significant scientific experiment
of the signifier within the signified
parole and langue dancing a minuette
waltzing across vienna to a cohen tune
each in a famous blue raincoat of infidelity
that takes you down memory lane
to the wonderful wizard of odd

at 2 a.m.
high on cold medicine
i think i can feel a hand holding me down
just mirror-talk
midnight vagabonds traipsing
across fields and marshes of dementia
in search of searching
a dog chasing its tail
a snake consuming itself
a perfect metaphor that folds in on itself
like a quantum singularity
physics meets poetry
and in the bloodbath that ensues
you get circular nonsense spewed forth at 12:13 a.m.
from fingers too tired to follow the electrical impulses of the mind and cerebellum
now physics meets biology meets poetry
and the three-way struggle isn't sexy
its purely chaotic
and beautiful in a self-contradicting way...
even this
even this

there are fields of white outside
but in here it’s red that carries the day

the words hang upon the craters of another plain
two, three deep, clambering over each other
waving blank petitions in the air
speaking without being heard
and thus not really speaking at all

a daily and simple ritual
a preference for smaller bits of language
consumption, congestion: lists of lists
minutiae of another’s grief that one may analyze
with the right tools and point of view

to march in rhythm and to sing in rhyme
to live as if the backbone of poetry gave a universal sign
of halt and live and breathe deep
dance and sing and even weep
for all things come to an end

even this, even this
a conversation unfinished

terrified of slipping into nothingness
I hunt for the proper word or turn of phrase
seeking through my mind's dictionary
the volumes of Shakespeare that I have memorized
but can never recall
verses of Racine and La Fontaine
amorous musings of medieval troubadours
the thunderous and terrifying rhythm of Pushkin
insidious lists of nonsense

what is the word

how could the shadows of dead men bring light to this miasma

still each of us calls to our muse as the need arises
a Phoenix returning and re-returning to the scene of the crime
the horrible homicide that language brings about each time we speak
a death that is my own in you and yours in me
as we fall together down the rabbit hole
passing all manner of fixtures, each piece holding its own secrets
but we have not the time to open the chair and ask it questions
the ground approaches, a terrible reversal of normalcy

a conversation unfinished
an everlasting refrain giving us pause
washing over the speakers and listeners like a tidal wave of silence
the noise that renders all touch impossible
yet is the only path towards the Other

a conversation unfinished
but never begun
compulsion to return
to pick up again that which was unfinished
to give pause and rest to the eternal refrain
that omnipresent chord to which all things harmonize
an inevitable river guiding me, pulling me, tugging, drawing -

hyperbole in the best and worst sense of the word
all at the same time

how many dimensions can you encompass in one word?

simplicity. minimalism. nothingness.
the poetic vocabulary always sought
the grasping of the pen away

to rest. to sigh. to sing.
to fly. to die. to be reborn.
hallelujah. amen.