

from *NONE OTHER*

Allan Peterson

THE NATURAL WORLD

There is no other
To explain where it came from is speculation like reading
water from a faucet. Beyond what we think
in our dreams or ideas it is still there
even the island of walruses

Inside a house he said
—the man from the rain forest—
inside that Bijoux, Rex, that Paramount, was a hill with steps.

He'd seen it.
And they go up, the whites, the egret people,
they go into the cinema balcony and stare out.

In the dark
ghosts appear on the walls.
Huge people of no substance doing terrible things.

It is death
dreaming on the walls he says.
Back home he will eat only songbirds and howlers
needing their voices to help him
say what happened.

Opening the index I see my list
Chordata
the worm that cries out from its ordered words,
from paper white from oxygen,
type black as onion fields near Sodus, New York,
from centuries of bedrock crumbled together with the old sea floor
things freshly pulled from the earth
and displayed
in neat rows at the roadside stand.

Madame Vidalia, dressed in slips, a seer from below.
Russets whose brown skins bake open.
They are protective
if we know their names:
Kingdom Phylum Class.

Opening Webster's to *estivation*
I thought was a summer sleep, what lungfish do in the dry season,
land snail stuck to the house plaster,
I find it the arrangement of petals within a flower before it opens as well,
and maps of their little inner galaxies,
spiral backbones,

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and other names in reverence,
words said softly to the dark:
involute. revolute. obvolute.
convolute. supervolute. induplicate.
conduplicate. plaited. imbricated. equitant.
valvate. circinate. twisted. alternative. vexillary.
cochlear. quincunx. contorted.
curvative. equitant.

Twenty.

By this time none of my friends will be listening.

Imagine a page
orbiting the 320 possible faces of crystals,
ointment from *anoint*,
a scented oil pressed from a flower by a six-fingered hand
from the frieze of posies and ampersands.

Imagine in each train window
that heads are depicted so completely they cannot come loose,
like a traveling exhibition,
each face a moon floating like babies waiting to be born,
moving through the stark cities and ragged yards

We name durations
We do not name the shorter disasters:
tornado *Alice*, waterspout *Belle*,
don't name lightnings
or the gust from the chimney dousing the lights.

In Nebraska
another tornado tries to screw something heavenly to the fields
whose rows come together in the theoretical distance.

We hear the wind next door
get caught trying to slip unnoticed through the wind chime.

A reminder
the world insistently presses against us
not like frotteurs on subways or a bus in Rome
but like azaleas the window, the water propping the house up so we'll notice,
tight as peptides.

We cannot pick blackberries anymore
on the path to The National Seashore
because they spray for mosquitoes even where no one is living.
So many so afraid of nature they send trucks to end it.
If they looked back they might see their own long reluctant shadows
as if dragging their deaths behind.

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EARTH SCIENCE

A silence
as when leaving a city the uniting quiet spreads
like the transformational influence of the art of some underdogs.
On a ledge overlooking Arkansas
delicacy is not lost in distance anymore than quartz or olivine
in the crystallization of magma
though you may grow woozy near the edge.
The inadequate is us.
Genetics is like the flurry of Daggers and Prominents
in the halogen death-moons at the Texaco gas plaza in Eureka Springs
calculating quietly without us.

None of this requires a creature self-aware.
No catastrophists. No creationists. No arrogant nations whose rockets protect them.
No one unfolding the Alps on paper
while wooden structures change quietly to stone.
A couple drawn unwittingly together because of their underbites.
Myths are how one participates
assured the impossible is ours.

The unconvinced
want footnotes a throw rug on the ocean floor new windows for deflecting firearms.
Departures from normal are magnetic anomalies.
Finding tireless islands like the cookies from last March still unopened on the table.
Christmas cards from the year before that. We are accruing a schematic.
The continents are slipping but the older is not farther off
only covered up on the coffee table by National Geographics.
Clastics. Synclines.
Fortunes faded and brittle.
Footprints turned to stone.

SOLVING FOR X

Aristotle and his cranky commentators,
Darwin's critics in a dark room like bees dazed by endless clover,
the buffalo down to a few,
the subtracted intimidating sound of wings of passenger pigeons,
a thundering softness, darkening at noon the plains of Kansas,
now a long lost wind in a unique contrivance, uniquely human:
extinction from abundance.

To Hell
with the Argument by Design. Something has gone wrong
down on the planet whose atmosphere swirls like a soapy fever.
The sick animal, earthly in fatigues,
is armed and reloading.
A structured leading edge manages lift from a partial vacuum
and laminar flow.

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It contains the strong hollow bone of a bat
or gun barrel.
Some parakeets are thriving in Palm Harbor, some pets flushed,
others let off at the end of the road in another neighborhood.
This is close as we come to solving for X,
a diminishing equation.

To the unknown
and presumptions about them
the propositions are like a concerto in three movements:
Arrow of Time,
which may turn backwards into its flight path
after skewering the target;
Illusion of Equilibrium,
recognized when after dinner overlooking the sunset, we have to ask who is purring
and what color does arsenic turn in the atmosphere anyway;
and More the Merrier,
which we never believed, in which exuberance and poignancy fall on the same note,
prolonged, prayerful, unheard.

CONSERVATION OF ENERGY

We use *dead* center for bullseye
We like reckless since it sounds like *no wrecks*
but is dying just the same
Like blasting both our fathers to powder
the process and language denying
what we always said about bodies: keep them care for them
as themselves as ideas
like concentric circles that are guides
ribs in a long dark tunnel.

We like to say *pass on* *pass over*
like to say *outtage* like the lights
but we clutter our sky with star hiss and animals
so thickly they cannot

In the backyard earth
the generality we know best about the planet
compost reduces by half
refuse returning to earth in one season
encouraging
the gas-lit grass each blade a perfect stranger
dagger-flames green as envy
all numbers lucky lotto another chance
We are after more
than the usual understanding
more brainstem more sweethearts
lasting life

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LOSING TRACK

They are libraries.
Even the little doily maker is a book itself,
from the book of spiders, a speck that looking at plain air
sees a place in it where silk geometry could fit,
shapes too fine to focus a shadow,
and knows how its snowflake deforms and wobbles
more than $2=XY$ on the graphing calculator,
how to stay calm
while the threads go limp between the two waving stalks of goldenrod,
and recognize wind that peels bark,
flakes the micro chips of the tempera Last Supper in the damp refectory,
that borrows a book of its own when a dopey looper tingles its feet.

I lose track. The magazine details flutter on my knees
awaiting a check-up
A blurred figure is swimming in a lighted pool,
then Nigeria drifts past, something in neon, the gas that shivers all night
in its glass letters without fatigue,
the toothed stars that settle in just above the trees in a time-lapse,
a low breath.
And what is whispered splits like a milkweed
and drifts.

I cannot open like the book of wallpaper samples
but learn from those who can
make the crocodiles see-through, show the baby in the kangaroo,
make rats out of shadows,
find a scorpion drifting in the clouds, bones in my clothing on a chair.
And from whom we overlap:
Freud in my father's lifetime, Einstein in mine
a few blocks away on Mercer in Princeton.
Then Hitler for us both, confusions of the inner ear,
a sick swirling.

SYNCHRONICITY

Writing in the dark to the myth between the metaphors,
to the hawks afraid to cross water,
commensals, herbivores, to whom it cannot possibly matter.

In childhood, the long wingless inconvenience,
I breathed faster to hasten my growth,
anxious to put on my own clothes in a home of my own
with safe objects, starch into sugar,
rattles of hand bones and a thousand books.

I wanted to say what it tastes like, everlasting nouns
and parkland in a single room.
I read silently how the skull meant vanity

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the year I had measles
and at the moment of burning the skin is sterilized.

In the pages that followed, the animals influenced stars
and coincidence. Our canary
voided an egg while flying from the cabinet to a chair
the moment a robin broke the window
with its neck, my rabbit screamed from a dog, and Jupiter
boomed the horizon.

Among the products of reason is infection in the abstract,
geometric quiescence, in boats going out
to dampen water with their nets, candles weeping
for the sadness of combustible fats.
The reason for this is everything at once, acausal,
as the sun's gold coin
melted before me, or a mirror refusing us.

At the bottom of the cage we had shredded newspaper,
so in the nest the babies were raised
in a swaddling of car wrecks, marriage,
pictures of MacArthur and his famous speech,
the first words pleading to the candle shedding its light
not to spread fire, to poignancy, and the unanimous
sea-starved Minnesota.

IF'S WIDESPREAD

Fossil gasses,
boneless aromas released from long-softening tree ferns,
pass through the fence unchanged, and the mailman,
a fortuitous confluence of the apparent and supposed
delivers every afternoon in a rusting Camero.
With them, we have arisen without the faintest recollection,
made possible by the cooling process,
crystals on a string deduced from evaporation and sugar water.
This lessens nothing, nor lasts.
Seeing October's night sky, Frances says time for the Fair;
crisp and cool and stars become rides as she watches.
Under us,
the earth accelerates to just faster than we can remember,
as single pictures link in continuous syrup
at certain speeds, or on a mission in the next drifting room,
we forget our purpose and continuity is lost.

What appeared to be a miracle of leaves fallen all on their edges
on the bank of the Sweetwater-Juniper
rose in a cloud of lemon alfalfas as we brushed past
in grinning canoes, rafts of pleasure in the presence of the vast,
expressed minutely.
Nothing is everywhere at once, but local things mingle

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and drift as if the present were not speaking of the past, gravity was not
weaker than your knees after the Twister or Tilt-A-Whirl;
if's were not widespread.
If it sometime grows frozen, if it broils in the future,
if merely the bees were extracted,
none of this would be here,
and lightning
would erase the answering machine.

INSIGNIFICANCE IS EASY

By *hemispherical traits* he meant
of the Americas,
not things causing you to swell up like walking in tight shoes,
plumping from anchovies,
or wandering in circles with a broken wing,
not seeing the sculptured sallow moth on the side of the gas pump
as I did today, picking it out of the thousands of details,
in themselves all underestimates and way too severe as abstractions,
like fingers in the Finger Lakes.
This is unusual.
Nothing plain and monumental.
Not forbidding like a fortress against the light
as the mission churches of Acoma, but an intimate sculptural splendor
for which you must tighten your time scale or miss,
change your depth of field or be blurred,
have its dignity unnoticed like a Deputy Assistant
Undersecretary of Interior Blind Corners,
one of the chairmen of the final minutes till midnight,
a pheromone recognition system
tuned to three parts per quadrillion, unseen until it moves,
proving nothing arrives pre-formed
but as evidence of a vast history of adaptation.
And the conditions pass through us,
an imagination ghost-filled, a vest button lost in the gorge of the Colorado.
Who invented the rectangle is long lost,
or the man in the photograph standing on the back of a bi-plane,
but insignificant is easy
as the long pointed arches of the Gothic are wishbones.

Allan Peterson is the author of two books, *All the Lavish in Common* (2005 Juniper Prize) and *Anonymous Or* (2001 Defined Providence Press Prize). His third book, *As Much As*, is forthcoming from Salmon Press, Ireland. In addition, he has five chapbooks. The most recent, *Omnivore*, won the 2009 chapbook prize from Bateau Press. Other recognitions include fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and The State of Florida. The selection published here is the complete first section of an unpublished manuscript, *None Other*. More information available at: www.allanpeterson.net.