

ODE TO A NIGHTINGALE

—for Russell Dillon

This morning, a sea of summer-
green in the sky I'm up early
to go running five miles
and think about flight for an essay
Poetry's for the Birds

But first, I do last night's dishes,
eat a Granny Smith apple, and listen again
to a voicemail from my friend

Russell, while stretching my blasted
forty-six year old self, which hurts
from playing dodge ball on the trampoline
with Agnes Agnes is nine now,
and her trouncing me at dodge ball

is an entirely different story (so here I won't
go into it), but in the voicemail, which is
part of this one, Russell reads

a quiet poem, leaking Freon and sadness, his voice
a rough blanket The time signature on the call
says 5:30 a.m., which means it was 2:30
in California, the state from where he was
calling, and when my alarm went off

it was two hours after that The birds already
chirping their muted green sun I made a cup
of black coffee The dog ate

THIS MANIC NEW TRIPPERY

This manic new trippery. Green apples, red meat.
Powdered sugar. O angels. And now, seduced
again by the panic of being and vanishing elegantly

from the squall of this earth. Someday, but not. Some-
day, but not really. My hope is but soon. And here

among the weeds, or out running the thick canopies of trees,
our lungs do their work, most efficiently, mechanically,
in concatenated glee, glowing from the inside

to the outside to the override, crashed on the rocks
and wildly sort of blinking. The crows in rows spray

rags of sound, and I start from where I'm making out
what life has to offer—drinking a beer and/or
reading a book, comprehending nothing. I am

so inside myself. All the EXITs welded shut,
and the angels up above only lounge around smoking

on the cover of a record I remember from forever.
Glistening for no one. We are falling, so we fall. Joy
persists on our kerosened wings. Rebellious

in our ragged jeans, happy being lost. We flail around
stunned, almost singed, fingers crossed.

SUPERMASSIVE BLACK SQUIRREL

—for and after Tomaž Šalamun

The beach grass waving brightly at my knees is a sign
The boys on the motorcycle might be
a sign The brown rabbit and the skunk musk

are not anything, but the oily sheen on my coffee
pretends it's a movie I should be watching

what it shows me Two crows attacking each other, or
two men speed-shucking oysters—one of them with purpose,
the other merely glued-to-it, whatever that means

A giant petunia-maker, whatever that means I say,
lookout, to the former, not the latter, which is a confusion

Crisis manager Forefinger Head cheese slathered
on a French baguette Sign of the cross on a convoy in the desert
The fighter pilots cockpit, so the fighter pilots jet And the sound

of a choir breaks open in shards, little blue eggshells,
little tiger-ish roars And the universe unblossoms

its scurrilous blouse, so to scramble itself with myself and yourself
Purple leaves Reactivity A violent blue wind
but the spell is incomplete Wing-smash of centrifuge

Torso-scribbled lemon juice What's written says, Absence, or
Light pours over shadows, like heavy-duty butter cream

And when it's finished, the blank that's left implies a vast
and fuming set of new possibilities O monster so close
you're inside us already Hollering at taxis, a little crooked

for our love Rhinos, weasels, demi-gods, moss
Little girl with bloody nose Event horizon cluttered
with a billion starry skulls Winter comes early
when the one who whistles calls

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Then suddenly a finch
with blazing orange tail feathers
lands on the new bird feeder,
the one that's in the tree
not ten feet away But
a squirrel with its bushy
frantic feather-duster
goes ballistic with tick-tick-ticking
disturbing everything And the bird
flies to pieces Stupid squirrels
so rackets, even the geraniums
don't like them There's nothing
to do about it, but keep refilling
the bird feeders, repotting the flowers
Nature always has its way I go back
back to the mysteries, of course—
unworrying the stars
with relaxedness for once
Come out into the light on the deck, you'll see
Even at night, it's a miracle
Beach towels scattered everywhere
Socks on the lawn Baby nuzzling
against my shoulder, and all living things,
instinctually Did I mention
the baby There's a baby
"Maybe the last one in the family"
Melanie made a note He's not
our baby He's our nephew
and right now very sleepy
The birds and black squirrels
and mosquitoes don't concern him
And since they don't concern him,
they don't concern me The two of us
don't regret anything Alive
and mighty, that's always and only
what we ever want to be The baby
likes to be bounced, so I continue
to bounce The stars
in their blaze make light
of the darkness A high
high seriousness
Gerard Manley
Hopkins

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The blank becomes more and more
difficult How to fill it when it's dark
and my people are out shopping
at the next door neighbor's for sugar or apples,
flashlights or eggs
I remain, as ever, on hiatus, even working at home—
meaning I remember very little of the white hot
daylight, especially once the fire dies down
into night's lesser racket It seems I should be
doing more for the hungry dogs and people
I should be blossoming The colors of me
should get really clashy and ridiculous—raddichio
and lemons, turpentine and zebras—but all I see
for days is this chair and no beer and no reason
for much of anything
Somehow
in the afternoons
I rouse myself and exercise, take a shower,
pick up the little girl on time at her school But
I want to tell you there are nihilists in the air
There are rock stars on the porch
I am neither one of those things My dreams
don't come and go I don't get special
packages of deer meat and hashish
delivered to my door The door
I don't answer The phone I don't answer
I should be doing more for the veterans
and orchids My wife's back home,
then my wife's out to dinner My daughter's
again with Grace, playing Hungry Hungry Hippos
or watching *Mary Poppins* I'm reading the snow
as it sprawls and looking there for any blemish, any last green
shoot or the orange part of a robin which is beauty
more than anything, a break in all the whiteness,
something to open up to, or shake loose a transistor
I don't know what I want I don't know what
I expect in the dimming purple light of winter
When Grace leaves
to go home for dinner, Agnes walks into the office
where now I'm writing notes for a lecture on a new
Sublime I'm using the Blood Brothers' "Laser Life" video,
supermassive black holes, the Internet's cosmic, gargantuan

entanglements

“Thank you,” says Agnes,
and I wonder for what,
but before I can ask her, I realize she’s reading aloud
from a greeting card—absently it seems, like she’s thinking
about something else, some other time when she said
“Thank you” and meant it, or about when somebody said it
to her and it meant that she had done something nice for them,
something little, like her The greeting card, I notice,
has a lion-headed dandelion on it Its spiky face
grinning on a stringy green stalk, the backdrop a torrent
of pink and gold diamonds

And when Agnes sees me
looking up from my writing,
she starts to sing a song,
What do you do PUNCHINELLA PUNCHINELLO,
What do you do PUNCHINELLO in the shoe

Then,
“When will you be finished,” she asks the next second,
and when I don’t answer right away, she follows up
right away, “Can’t you stop what you’re doing,
and come play a game” I look at her face
It’s always the same, a billion pink suns
I stand up slowly and abandon my post

MATT HART

Matt Hart is the author of several books of poems, including *Sermons and Lectures Both Blank and Relentless* (Typecast Publishing, 2012), *Debauched Debauch* (H_NGM_N Books, 2013), and *Radiant Action* (forthcoming, H_NGM_N Books, 2016). Additionally, his poems, reviews, and essays have appeared or are forthcoming in numerous print and online journals, including *The Academy of American Poets* online, *Big Bell*, *Cincinnati Review*, *Coldfront*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, *H_NGM_N*, *Harvard Review*, *Jam Tarts Magazine*, *jubilat*, *Kenyon Review* online, *Lungfull!*, and *POETRY Magazine*, among others. His awards include a Pushcart Prize, a 2013 individual artist grant from The Shifting Foundation, and fellowships from both the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference and the Warren Wilson College MFA Program for Writers. A co-founder and the editor-in-chief of *Forklift, Ohio: A Journal of Poetry, Cooking & Light Industrial Safety*, he lives in Cincinnati where he teaches at the Art Academy of Cincinnati and plays in the band TRAVEL.