

## FIGURE STUDY

*for J*  
*at Moby Dick, 18th Street, San Francisco*

Blanketed on pool-table-top your bare ass  
shines, burrowed

in the bought-broken eyes  
of onlookers, spectators pitched forward  
against their wrists frantically drawn

to the drawn-upon cheek  
rendered in charcoal or graphite or ink,

the elbow sharp, papered and flown

against the cock caught  
pocketed between timber-thighs

and held hand  
to mouth

against the tempest bodied here in strange corner bar  
against drafts of gin and feet.

... There in your eye is a wet vacancy.

Recline beneath the fluorescence  
into your pose—breadth of nothing but

a beyond breath, pockmarked

pitch of jaw,  
verb to clause, every part a part  
of what it is not—

cheek, hand,  
range of the rug-worn rib.

*We expand in the work of the sketch:*

your will, want, calf-apple too short,  
a knee hole full and rough.

I know this pose, one leg extended,  
split against the spit of the other

bent casually ever-so at the knee,  
arm propped holding the weight entire  
of whatever burden you carry with

in large hands that look from here  
—a wreck of perspective—  
the size of seals.

Yes, you are extended, an  
extension of limbs

drawn taut against flat

front, curved back, brought to battle against  
broad front. What-

ever genius you possess is lost

on that stool, holy perch.  
The ever-pheasant, no, -pleasant, no,  
-present laughter  
from the bar beyond.

*A crook in the arm ... does your love*

sleep there, a tuft of hair,  
where, there,

beyond the succulent grass  
but before the demented  
river of your youth.

Don't fall, friend. Don't  
lose your soul, keep breathing, don't  
forget to stretch. Stop. Switch my pen.

Contour. Contour.  
Where's my drink.

(Each pose deeper grows  
into itself, into you, I  
can hear the limit groan,)

... Your body is simple shapes you can see  
if you look long enough, enough

to see the braid  
in the bicep, the slope in the toe.

That's it, relax, you're on a beach perhaps,  
or in the lap of God. He  
looking downly on you

while you in still comfort  
and reverence  
look up.

*Look up. The fur*

on your chest parts titanicly, close,  
wet as graves.

This cliché cannot  
be escaped. Can one call a pose trite?  
Because yours is, yet precise,

classic, a wonder here  
pool-table tableted by Himself him-  
self, like the furrows he has burrowed

on your chest. Blessed,  
that's the word—misunderstood,  
turned radical  
by the hard heart.

*How can I make "thigh" a verb;*

how form more than this:  
crotch-up, reclined, serviceable.

Anatomy of a back,  
turned away or turned toward  
what clutches it.

Foreshorten the hair, there and there.  
Burglarize the composition, here  
and here.

*What a wrong turn I could take on your ribs.*

... slope between  
two points,

exterior  
and interior,

shoulder ball to armpit pitch—

Footsteps across the forehead breaking into a team  
of shadows undaunted in capacity  
for love or honor, for thirst

and drink, for  
each ass

thrown upon the pool table of the eternal.

Begin again,

friend, begin your searing and pleating,  
wilding and winning, capture between  
drop and drop whatever waves of certainty you can—

thrust-faint I

place—have already—my faith  
  
on your shoulder, immovable,  
tense, and so  
    closely observed.

## AN ACCIDENTAL EXHIBITIONIST

Among the pelican's crest of blue to bluing sea and beach  
where we infrequently display among the others there  
(men in whom the wish to wound is as obvious as their lack  
of let's be honest skill in cruising one-another and as their, and our, lack of clothing),  
roots rub against towel against sand.

And we are pink or brown or black or not as leathery  
as the ancient locals whose bellies belie their unswaddled confidence  
as they approach and scoff our just as obvious lack of protective base,  
for we continuously apply sunscreen in an aerosol cloud sea-spray thin;  
what's left of our modesty

we left at the car above the cliff that blocks from view of Highway 1  
our unsunned skin. This could be as Eden was for them, but here we are  
among it all, and although the beach is not strict nor official  
about its purpose (you will for instance see the occasional nude woman  
or clothed family with kids)

it is hard not to feel some Calamus camaraderie among all these dicks.  
I feel foolish as I write this, yet, and yet, it's true the eros among us  
as in that man there, brown with baggy white shirt and baggy boxers  
sloughed off around his ankles, who performs for us a stroking masterpiece  
as timed as trochees were, or would be.

We went again and brought binoculars  
to see him in the same white shirt and boxers  
but this time he was climbing the rock up the cliff barefoot  
but I can't say why, perhaps he wanted a better view of the sea.  
It was particularly purple that day,  
overcast yet our beach found at times a pocket in the fog,  
and all that gray circled around us benign,

a stormy whorl to which  
we paid no attention (why would we among all that other awe),  
and I swear the former performer perched  
on the rock saw it too,

and although he avoided eye-contact with me,  
with us, together we acknowledged as much.

About awe, nothing but acknowledgement.  
Some will try to own it.  
Perhaps myself am guilty of this, like dust, perhaps nothing is more  
humbling than an imminent sea in which a body moves not  
by its own will but by the water's  
pull and eviction,  
fight that cannot be won except by surrender.

I have begun to dream of swimming in the sea,  
have only recently discovered in water a medium for movement  
yet find myself obsessed  
with unearthed freedom of and from breath.  
Water demands withdrawal;  
I have felt, though incomplete, enough of it to wonder why  
in the garrulous hothouse of life on land  
it isn't practiced more, or honored, or.

Some bravery of body  
required; showing it off  
like a prime cut; belly and balls protruding;  
exhaling air thus expelled  
like stone sinking;  
a new kind of error  
revealed in an "alien" element.

— No. This is a lie we tell,  
that this element's other, making tolerable  
our first expulsion from water.  
When we return we remember  
that first breath of air as betrayal,  
cruel in its promises and crueler  
in its gray and grappling compulsions.

Of that paradise, what.  
As well as not imbued with the same eros as our  
cliff-caught beach where the agents of erosion

rebuff the bigness of the body;  
everyone seems small,  
necessarily, and nobody minds.  
To mind would be simple, would be

near sacrilege—for these cliffs  
are of course the heart-battering,  
dust-returning, self-same sublime  
as all those poets saw and heavily  
remarked upon, only here remarked  
mutely then erased, adorned only  
with glittering gyzym in the sand,

for what is life if it is not the  
three men who, having glanced their last  
communicative glance, walk off  
together behind some rocks out of view;  
they are alive, as is the one  
our performer who it seems comes  
to the beach as often as he can to get off,

and as are the seven players  
at the hairless slick of one-another:  
an obnoxious orgy too near (“they took  
our spot”) to our tame couple. We heard  
their raucous strip and pop of champagne,  
then nervous laughs, then busy silence;  
we caught oddly hostile glances

from the group’s international stud  
while he was in another, flasher  
of rabid smiles, they brought him here  
although he needed, we heard, to be  
at the airport in an hour. Our beach,  
their bed, loudly betrayed. Finished,  
two wandered to the waves to wash their cocks.

Why here? What is it with the sea  
and being watched? In the locker room of the pool  
wherein I swim an habitual mile  
our nudity does not inspire  
such pomp as at the beach, keeping

eyes averted and averring that the  
beautiful broad-shouldered bearded man

in the tiny gray briefs loose a little  
around the bulge does not entice,  
although he does, when he stands before  
his lane or before the urinal,  
face forward or behind, legs a bit  
apart, ass yes enticingly round;  
all and clearly this despite the hope

of many is not a sexless place, and  
although water can loose a body  
in the quick rip of a deadly current  
it can also command uninhibited  
the cock, the chest, the legs let go,  
a thin permeating desire  
like words are, or breath, or.

(My dream of swimming in the sea  
admits me. I pull and breathe and it  
spreads its icy hostility

quickly but then, slowly, admits me  
as only struggle admits, my mouth  
brackish gaping, being stripped.  
Weak and yet affirmed, I. My stroke

a sea gull-glanced glide, as if dis-  
embodied, I and the tide.  
My blood my variable heat woken

and worn away by the winter water.  
My skin made nearly errorless.  
A body, this. And after one  
brief December lap I return

to the little bar of sand, the dock,  
emerge as if renewed yet only

new, not entirely breathing air

again until I find myself  
warm in the shower and the sauna,  
congenially nude. And only then  
do I begin to talk again.)

## CHRISTOPHER J. ADAMSON

**Christopher J. Adamson** is a California-based poet, critic, and essayist. His writing has appeared in the Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive and publications including *ZYZZYVA*, *Boston Review*, *Tammy*, and *Southwest Review*. This fall he will join the PhD program in Creative Writing and Literature at the University of Southern California. Read more at [christopherjadamson.com](http://christopherjadamson.com).