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Poetry Style Experimentation

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Poem Set 1

Poet Read: Richard Siken

Collection Title: *War of the Foxes*

Stylistic Elements Identified to Integrate: Conversational language, Use of multiple voices

White Noise

The screen is white and the sound is white, allegedly.

White sounds like disappearing.

White says *I choose to reflect all color back at you so you cannot see my soul.*

But at least there's a beauty to it. This is a joke
that starts at a coffee shop at two in the morning.

White: *I take my coffee with no sugar, no cream.* Black
is another color that has a sound but
the sound is not silence.

My heartbeat scares me. It makes me here and I feel it. I hear it.
Maybe it's the caffeine. *There is already too much space between
the heart and the lungs and
I don't know what to do with that information.*

I am not a doctor: the body
is a prism of light, no more.

Black whispers *a prism
sounds like a jail cell. Admit it.*

The voice comes from the coffee in the mug
where our faces ripple, illuminated
against a dark curtain and
it looks like our mouths are the ones moving.

This is a joke that ends at three in the morning
with Black and White reenacting the balcony scene
but it's unclear who is the lover and who is condemned to die.

This means that I'm trying to sleep but
all I can think about is the dream you told me
where I was invisible and gone and only
when my body faded could you finally see
every word in my chest fallen to your feet,
set free.

Why did you say that?

Why did you have to say that to me?

Endless Summer

Summer is only a season we pass through in circles
which is an interesting way to define seasons
and circles.

If I remember correctly, circles have infinite sides which means they don't have any and I say this only because it's interesting how nothing and everything find themselves eye-to-eye in the end. I can't remember the math to prove it but I know love is a number and grief is a number and they can be set equal, staring at each other: half drowning, half thirst.

With this in mind, I should mention I know nothing about a season that never ends except the one turning over like a wave in the heart, upending again and again like yellow light unending, carving the afternoon into a word to cover it all. (Like darkness?) (No, not yet.)

Call it *sadness* and it might make sense but you'd be lying. Call it *grief* and you're a little closer but still in the past tense. Call it *a summer day*: a soft wind stealing everything you meant to say, the earth moving beneath you and you can feel it, that subtle spin lulling the afternoon into a daydream. The clouds puffy and white like when you were a child and the clouds were not-clouds and you played a game while staring up at the sky, laying flat against the ground, where you made the clouds everything they could be instead, everything you wished you were and somehow that still hasn't changed: you still want to be timeless and brief. You're still scared of infinite stairs ascending into a cloudy haze of more infinite stairs.

God was a cloud, once. Not a not-cloud and certainly not a just-cloud. No, he was just a word we held above our heads to forget what we do to each other with our hands. White Jesus in a crisp-clean business suit with a shadow under his suede-soles. It's only fair, I think, that God has a shadow. It's only fair that he must sleep beside his sins like the rest of us. God, from his whiteboard, setting boundless number sets on fire and naming them after us: *Of course it isn't fair, fairness is a thing I invented and so did you and now you want to complain about ethics and morals and judgment and other academic words when you're just too afraid to say that you're*

afraid of the darkness you found in the center of your eyes. (All the light that passed through them. Where did it go?)

Ignore him. Call it *love*. Call it *desire*, that dirty flame in the dead of night french-kissing everything desperately. There, that's better. I made it make sense. Doesn't it make sense? Call it *luminescence*: guessing where the light will land, hesitating to look behind you to see that your body already swallowed it. Isn't it beautiful how it illuminates every place you've been broken, bleeding through the fissures of your smile? You disagree. You worry we kill the light with our teeth hungry for warmth. Desire, again. *Devastating, isn't it?* Desire for what? *Devastation, is it not?*

And there you have it, there it is. You are afraid of this life: zeroes on the bottom of a fraction. A slow-dance under the sun hurtling through space towards space. So call this *endless summer* then if it makes you feel better, what do I care? Set the day aflame and stare into the heat stitching the horizon to the ground. The setting sun suspended in amber hues just before surrender and this is everything you've ever wanted, isn't it? This is everything you've ever asked for. This is nostalgia before the moment ever ends. This is youth sitting in the front seat of the car, windows down, going nowhere. This is infinite, golden, goodness this is

heaven.

But heaven has been empty for years now, you said you made it that way. You said *I can't stand the reflection of myself in your eyes* and I assumed it was because you saw yourself mirrored in twilight, bathed in it and fading, so I looked away. I looked away and you carried the light elsewhere. But now you are left all alone in the heart with nothing except the too-bright shine of summer sun to cover it all. (Like darkness?) (Yes, exactly like darkness.)

Infinite stairs in golden-amber-honey-red light
crumbling out of color into everything beyond it.

Infinite stairs ascending into more infinite stairs in the sky.

(Where are they going? What are they running from?)

(They must be going somewhere. Eventually, they must touch the night.)

L-train through Post-Industrial Landscape

Black and then more black
on gray. On the buildings,
his clothes, his eyes. Everything
hiding a leaving he couldn't name.
The exit signs on the highway
were of no help.

There was something,
a small razor-like mirror,
behind his eyes but he
couldn't quite see it in the stained-
glass reflection. Not holy
but hollow nonetheless.
So he grafted a metaphor onto it.
Called it a word he knew by heart:

the train doors opened to the whipping
sound of highway concrete and
he stood there surrounded
by everyone moving everywhere else,
all at once.

I've never felt more alone.

Poem Set 2

Poet: Louise Gluck

Collection: *The Wild Iris*

Stylistic Elements Chosen to Integrate: Line breaks in connection with tone; Formal/controlled language; Starkness of tone and subject

Hospice

I was in a room full of people remembering their lives
when he gave me his name
exiled from the body
like an echo returned to the air.
Why are my hands doing that?
Why are they fluttering?
Butterflies crawling out of the net.
Slowly, slowly—
a life is released.

Night Sky Before Dawn

More to come and more
to come. Everlasting.

Beyond this sheet
of stars there is glass:
a window not
a mirror.
Do not confuse reflection
with sameness.

We cannot condemn
anything to eternity
no matter how hard we try
we keep only
our teeth in the end:
vile things of
consumption.

Let's watch the stars
make tombstones of the day
and think nothing of what lies
beneath them.

Light consuming other light
on the horizon.
Death could have been prettier.

A play in which the actors and audience are unsure who is the monster

Words carving lips around midnight.
Murmurs of dreams
spoken into the dark—
not even the speaker
to hear them.
A spell.

That which we crave
appearing only
in the memory of language
warping our lives
into something recognizable.
A witch; a mother; a lover.

A cradle now haunted
by an infinitesimal dream.
Life beginning
with two screams
in the night.

S
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[ask them if they want something to scream back]

Poem Set 3

Poet: Carl Phillips

Collection: *Then The War*

Stylistic Elements Chosen to Integrate: Fluid freethinking like movement through poems; Use of punctuation to prolong sentences into train of thought; Qualifying statements in poems that allow change in subjects in sentence.

La Petite Mort

The answers change this time of night
when we are faced with the depths of our loneliness
and the hands belonging to us grow dark with the night and invisible,
visible perhaps only
in the trails of moonlight left behind
when we paint them over the fragile canvases made of our bodies:
another's touch becoming proof of ourselves
if proof is ever achievable, if the body ever solidifies into permanence;
not atoms, but change and movement personified into persons,
which leads us to abstract things, and back to each other's hands
engaged in definition;

sort of like how you can paint	a thing
without ever really painting	the thing,
instead painting	the darkness around it
and leaving the emptiness	untouched.

We did not ask for this violence
that we otherwise accept,
complacently, through breath,
which makes it active I guess,
conscious only upon occasion,
but mostly sub-
liminal which is to say beneath the layer of mind
that controls the mind
and in the body, the only threshold we can taste
touch and break
into one another—sub-
lime this time which is to say

a force beneath us, that moves us outside
our-selves into open air:

naked refugees of desire.

I swear we never asked for this:

the ruins of our bodies littering

our bodies as we throw ourselves

against each other in the night.

We never asked for anything more than

an answer to our own hollow echo.

Everything Bearing A Second Weight

A man writes in a notebook
with handwriting thin as bones, hiding itself,
which, come to think of it, is a bit disingenuous
as bones are the thickest parts of our body,
or at least the heaviest, if not the heaviest
then the sturdiest; femur bones snap
only under pressure extreme,
inversion of the above expression.

A man writes in a notebook and sees himself
inverted in an opaque mirror, because all things
solid, or liquid even, have a reflective quality
that conveys color or light in different moods:
the grammar of light waves in the subjunctive
says that if a shape can be seen, if a color can be seen,
then the viewer can see themselves in that object
if they look hard enough, strain their eyes and
accept that reflection is not sameness,
light is not proof, and everyone
has a darkness in them that sometimes
is the only way to see themselves:
a shadow hovering over the surface of water.

A man writes in a notebook with handwriting
thick as bones, revealing itself as dark
black ink bleeding through skin—he sees himself.

One act play in which we say what we mean

Scene 1: *Both characters sit across from each other, staring into an open flame of unknown origin.*

ME: There is a door at the end of my life and someone is knocking.

YOU: There needn't always be an answer, you know.

[This, in and of itself, is an answer too. Echoes, echoes. Both of you are hiding something.]

ME: What are we doing here?

Scene 2: *The flame spreads to ME & YOU. They turn to each other: burning bodies, words on fire.*

ME: I wish I loved you.

YOU: Stop screaming. Stop it.

ME: I have an indescribable longing for something more than this.

[DESPERATION claws at the brink of SOLITUDE. From violence is love, from violence is loneliness.]

Scene 3: *Words of fire and words of smoke. Pompeii lovers speaking; dust returning to dust all around them. YOU and ME know this and nothing still: ashen tongues: burning kiss: searing truth: silence.*

ME:

YOU:

ME:

YOU:

ME:

YOU:

ME/YOU: What are we doing here?

[Answers fall from both of your bodies. Like gravity, you fall into each other.]

Poem Set 4

Poet: Noah Warren

Collection: *The Destroyer in the Glass*

Stylistic Elements Chosen to Integrate: Heavy but not antiquated language; Integration of imagery from my personal, quotidian life.

Final draft full of mirrors and murderers

I. When given a pen the first thing we habitually write
is our names

as if to remind ourselves
of ourselves.

As if to make a mirror of black ink
on the page where we might
find pieces of our hands

scattered.

II. Writing requires erasure. Point blank
bullet holes through the page...

little endings with their own gravity

smothering reflections
into night

silencing some other word
into a vacuum of breath
continuing.

III. Line. Strikethrough. Line.
Full stop like curtain falling—
Dash like knife wound:

separation of page, separation of flesh, separation of self:

shattered mirror.

Line. Strikethrough.
Something is missing.

Every reflection returns to itself less whole.

IV. Each word crossed out:
a silence, a name,
a violence.

Everyone has killed
something.

V. When given a pen we often mourn
the parts of ourselves
 we have long since destroyed.

Eulogy written with hands that kill, pray, bury, kill again

if we were to grieve daily
would it grant us reprieve from this

one funeral a day for
thousands of years for-

getting everything already buried
gathering into the hands we buried
into bodies and remember *decadence*

how we fall

everlastingly—

Poem in which “I” and “I *alone*” am the speaker

Saw her again in a coffee shop. The same one.

Not sure the reason for returning.

There was another guy this time. Glasses. Long hair. Wiry frame.

Looked awfully similar to. Awfully not as in

incredibly, or as in drastically, but more in the sense of awful-ly:

horrible, horrific.

He looked like a synonym. Questioned

own internal definition and what tweaks she preferred.

More importantly, as the therapist will inevitably remind,

questioned the words stammered

when she asked whether the coffee was wanted in a mug

or to-go. *To-go.*

Poem Set 5

Poet: Ben Lerner

Collection: Collected Poems on *LyrikLine*: <https://www.lyrikline.org/en/poems/dark-collects-7369>

Stylistic Elements Chosen to Integrate: Abandonment of narrative; Use of one continuous emotion to guide the piece rather than sequential imagery or setting

Love letter found crumpled under the bed

It was only in the third reflection in the glass reflecting the glass that I caught her eye, our backs otherwise turned to each other. This made recognition rather difficult as I was not sure if I was three times removed or three times the inner of.

Paintings. Theater. Translations. What else is there to say of the ways in which we address the issue?

Cleave the chest open, hammer to the skull if you must, just be gentle.

I only share myself through art. Paintings. Theater. Reflections—

I take the landscape of another's mind and point and say *Now, do you understand? Can you hear me better if I am not the one speaking?* As if understanding could fix it, as if there was something solid and visible behind it all.

But there's not. There just isn't.

(I am eternally scared of love.)

There are many numbers that we use to count this grief: birthdays, body counts, digits on an analog clock, *I am not the same person I was when you once knew me*, etc.

Knowing is a verb that derives from a field of metaphysics that has no fucking clue what it is saying. But we already knew this. None of us have a fucking clue what we are saying.

A defeat in the hall of mirrors. To say what someone else says is coincidence until you realize we're all saying the same thing all the time and everyone is lying about it. We burn silently.

Nothing will save us. No one else is coming.

I have been searching for love for a long time because I think it will save me. Let me believe it.

(I can't keep doing this.)

Do you hear me?

(Please don't go.)

Elegy to all things still living

It is the end of the year and

I have lost so much.

There is something now familiar about the way
Christmas lights fracture through tears,
dancing colors suspended.

My childhood lingers like a shadow
in the corner of the room, on the small objects
on the desk. They each have a shadow, yes,
but it is not mine anymore.

Often I am struck by the weight
of this perpetual surrender:
most things more immortal than I am.

Summertime Sadness
is a song by Lana del Rey
that plays occasionally
reminding me of a lover
long gone.

Time travel sounds appealing until
the moment passes and you aren't sure
where you would go.

Where would you go?

Where have you gone?

I can't decide if I hate more the remembering
or the forgetting or
remembering that I have forgotten:
a loss beyond language.

Memory instead is a gradient
between imagination and
reality

because nothing continues
in the way we think of it.

Nothing ever dies
how we want it to either.

I left a piece of myself in the space between you
and I
and then we both moved forward unwillingly.

Astrophysics deals with these sorrows of perpetual motion.

The earth rotates around the sun which
spins in a larger galaxy which
dances in a larger universe
shaded black and without direction.

I can't see what we left behind.

I can't see where we are going.

A year is a circle that does not close.

Many things about this could be comforting.
The grief: shared: collective: unending.....
Many things about this could be true.

It is the end of the year
and there are fireworks
lighting the sky.
Behind them: stars,
each one given a name
and a memory to hold in twilight,
slowly blinking out.

Infinite time

Infinite graveyard.
I bury myself and move on.

Poem Set 6

Poet: Kaveh Akbar

Collection: *Calling a Wolf a Wolf*

Stylistic Elements Chosen to Integrate: Atypical form used to convey movement rather than separation; lack of punctuation used for fluidity of thought and separation from form; language that moves between conversational and beautified formal language to create expression.

Bank Teller in Shifting Light

There is a room filled with gold meaningless without
the light behind it could be silver
or bronze or copper if the light shifts this isn't
chemically accurate but for the most part gold is observed for its brilliance
and not anything chemical chemistry tends to unnerve people and
the minute facts of existence are of interest to no one
when they undermine beauty
begins in light but is carried out of it
the moment shifting into evening and suddenly
a lover's face is obscured into imagined
jewels and everything melts into the things we want it to
how we made a god from alabaster
then decided marble was a more appropriate
shade condemning sight
on anything monstrously divine yet we opened
our eyes to each other
anyway and found sin buried in our teeth
so gracefully
folded beneath the tongue.

Speak darkness and say love exists
only in the wild of ourselves like any other need
if that makes it holy or less
is unclear now in moonlight stand divided
mathematics has no place
in discussions of the soul except
when scales are reproduced
seven times for tradition's sake
wrinkled symbolism holding onto
meaning so damn selfishly
like light remembering
a long dead brilliance in the night

forget the rest and everything before it
forget the rest and everything before it
forget

the feeling of weight
the definition of light
the economy the news never shuts up about
finds gold to be of diminishing value

in an increasingly polarized age

we can never be sure what to value

but trust me when I say *not this*.

Not this.

Icarian Monologue

Let us reach for joy and touch every sadness softly along the way.
Sorrows in color and rhyme, standard notation and paint dripped dry.

Quills dipped in inks of darkness and inks of light
guiding us towards endings tattooed on our skin

melting never slow enough. Mourn the shaded
blue here, its royalty and richness it never asked for

and the waters it fell into from deep heavens.
Bruised cheek there where a hand

or a kiss once landed: lasting
embrace. Forget this violence

we think we owe one another and don't
think of love this time. Hold only your

two solemn stones for hands and decide
which form of matter they will take next.

Remember this radiance
when I move beyond it.

Jagged memory

I don't remember them
anymore. Last names were only for medical records
and faces all pressed into the same
exhaust of living.

Smoke exhaled into that room
in a circle. One by one we passed
the burning thing.

Can't apologize to dad.

Loves everyone.

Bathtub and blood on her arm.

Hasn't been the same since.

450 degree glue gun.

She only calls him now and tells him what a waste he is.

Pregnancy scare.

Started abusing drugs.

Threw out prescription.

Hasn't been the same since.

Could be one story or eleven.
Could be mine.

Bathtub and blood on her arm and a girl
sat down in front of me at the beach
and I noticed *blood on her leg*
solidified in skin's memory.

*Hasn't been the same since
hasn't been the same since
since the same hasn't been
the same since the hasn't
hasn't been the same since*

years ago. Years ago, I promise.
I don't want to show you.

The teabag from the mug
trails moments of red into the bone-white sink and
bathtub and blood on my arm.

The body is a blade

bent by grief.

I fold into myself
the same since
bathtub and blood on my arm.

It has been five years now.