





# *STANCES*

*Erik Noonan*

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For Mireille

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## SHADOWS ON GLASS

a friend arraigns my orphaned simple past  
tense finds it guilty of who knows what pronounces  
and carries out her sentence then  
admonishes me: certain pronouns might be next!  
what can one tell her now love lies among  
yard lizards beneath the umber air while she  
and I go free down courthouse steps toward lunch?  
that though I don't gloat not the least compunction  
at representing scoundrels occurs to me?  
the sidewalk fills with sleuths and on her face  
an irritated moue appears which I  
recognize from abandoned mirrors even as  
I can't say what for since she can't either  
another day trip in the danger zone

## THERE LIES LIGHTNING

a stormy blast has passed shelter is gone  
why go on masking dread with connoisseurship  
boycott the imaginary museum for once  
while you're at it don't split so many hairs  
we know when everybody gets together  
it's as if each overheard the rest at prayer  
but that gives no one license to call them out  
take a cue from those who worship worship  
behind our brand new Chapel of Saint Crevasse  
leave mean behavior to the pros and cons  
nobody here competes because if they did  
people like you could leave us in the dust  
just mind this tidy spot we keep reserved  
for suppressed terror stay outcast attaboy!

## DISCARDED LIKENESS

vainglorious it leans in from off a snapshot  
against no background but the faintest border  
which anyway has not been cut sets floating  
over blank space this face he "knew" was "his"  
not by someone's reaction as they ever  
revealed but by a novice's pure formal  
technique graphite on Bristol "photoreal"  
cold glitzy icon yeah right more like creep  
buzzkill says hearsay private eyes would  
make thereof what they could he for one saw  
subtlety ah what shadings! cheekbone brow  
fade out as does its gaze trustworthy skeptic  
whether such portraiture has flattered the  
sitter or no exposes its disguise

## DIGRESSION

what began as an attempt  
to salvage failed translations  
from French into lingo  
current during the nineteenth century  
invokes the Virgin's composure before Gabriel  
via the *Four Quartets* on accident  
"be it unto me according to thy word"  
one journal rejected this masterwork  
which I kept revising and a friend's magazine  
took it then never came out  
by the time someone years older  
who read me and espied my allusions  
opined about indentations and locutions  
disgust had turned to doldrums had turned to numbness

## ANTIQUITIES

sacral rubble and you splendid hills  
hold Rome by only a title  
restored monuments keep up the honor of dust  
formerly explorer poet doctor athlete statesman saint  
colossus arch theater sky's neighbor spire  
pompous triumph glorified bedazzlement  
all come down bit by bit to a cinder  
yet hear the silvery tone grace a brute resurgence  
with whimsy as Lassus sets du Bellay  
towers put up a long fight  
time terrifies works and names in the end  
teach desire how to feign ease so it seems like contentment  
time alters everything change brings  
torment and endurance to a close

## ODELET

moon lets down mystic hair while cloudy kings  
and crowds of stars ensky a lover whose  
heart ailed within secret glades and whose  
sepulcher braided vines embellish, the one  
illusion . . . . roses' glorious red raiment  
lost the whole plant browns under length of days  
oh Pierre dainty protean frenetic  
poets sing Hello my love into twilight  
hallowed and soft as thought all over Earth  
since we must leave its daisies lilies  
mint poppies hyacinth rue asphodel  
unworthy our due alms of breath the marbled  
globe and general sun who sup on dreams  
being at random strewn with our loving parley

## DELIA

by the open weather of her eye, I saw  
tempests long past, with skies all fair and clear  
now the air and the water already draw  
and urge me toward what I hold most dear  
so I raise my head: too full to bear  
its bounds, a midland sea of newfound mirth  
tops, and then brims, and overfills them, earth  
freshly recedes, and like the thoughts of those  
who win, my thoughts peacock for all they're worth  
led forth still by such waysign where it shows  
and as his lady Maurice Scève is defunct  
who left us here with a tale about lines  
by Petrarch discovered in Laura's tomb  
so unsure was he if she were mere pretext

## CHANSON

“taste” had left verse in sheaves of slurred discourse  
Malherbe took as truth the guise court life wore  
applied it to a Roman purity  
of diction then expressed this modernist doctrine  
by striking out every line in Ronsard  
that didn't measure up, which was all of them  
by filling his Desportes with margin notes  
and by a leveled standardized usage  
common speech conventional tropes  
and periodic syntax so regular  
you could almost take your pulse thereby  
Racan reports brusque rejoinders ruthless  
disdain sharp jokes generosity  
the reformation would succeed too well

## VERMEER: *WOMAN WITH A LUTE*

no yellow sleeve hung dancelike at wrist and elbow  
in muted contrasts with such a Fuck It air  
coat appears in the other paintings  
building's not hers instrument even face  
only this gesture tuning up belongs  
turning away out over whatever else  
notes bend she half smiles suspense slips  
between moods humors her eyes give voice to  
the lute would have been a throwback by those days  
hark falsely to simpler times fewer debts  
less property take loved ones off leaving  
wall map and viol cold company  
house a mere reliquary not hers  
who was all that enterprise knew of grace

CHARDIN: *THE YOUNG DRAFTSMAN*

abstracting form from complexity  
he copies in red chalk a red chalk sketch  
(broadly modeled figure on the three tone  
academic chiaroscuro scheme –  
shade plus indirect plus direct light)  
some painters learn to pipe down  
speak an extreme demanding quietness  
small pictures you approach closely  
lustre encroaching on highlight  
object matter of no separate interest  
rich subtle real paint texture  
supplying fictive bulk with contour  
it takes exertion to dream up this boy  
in a torn coat thinking about shadow

MANET: *CHEZ TORTONI*

not the Great Writer he might have painted  
ten years ago desk hedged about  
with colored prints plus beard pretentiously  
who lays a ladies' paradise aside  
to pose in profile as premier realist  
instead this moment stolen little canvas  
looks as if he made it on the spot  
stranger collar and hat comme il faut caught  
bock untouched café ignored cane chair forgot  
mot juste is just what he lacks the single word  
servility of portraiture delirium of  
impression both recede before an image  
city man ink on the make modern creature  
playing “the game of speech” therein most human

DEGAS: *DANCER POSING FOR A PHOTOGRAPH*

shock tactics composition-as-arrangement  
jargon learning-from-nature metaphysics  
with ties to all camps he sought an obstacle  
exercises in the esoteric Valéry says  
his dark eye never saw rosy light  
“painting isn’t difficult if you don’t know”  
Morisot recalls droll vivid table talk politics  
high-minded violent impossible as himself  
here a lofty studio’s tall windows show  
winter roofs diffuse backlight mingles  
sheer artifice of circumstance with her  
selfpossessed balance yet what she felt  
blurs like the master when extinguished early  
he rode the open decks of trams at evening

“FAIREST CHILD OF FLOWING TIME”

though no such time existed nor did the place  
I suppose in old parlor pagan England  
where Cowper notes Prior’s “ease” meaning poise  
tillage as livelihood or gardening as pastime  
stays daily real like labor’s and leisure’s face  
who each imposed decorum on the other from next door  
yet also conjures up all sorts of lives  
that might severally cultivate tact as grace  
which spares little room for human passion  
but go ask about commitments you’ll find  
a fictitious metaphor like Christ flakes out  
on his no less than Venus hers right from the start  
hence this urgency of fluent numbers  
when we measure out our hymns to the spring

“POETS MAY BOAST, AS SAFELY VAIN”

beside the chalkboard hung this billiard sign  
NO VULGAR LANGUAGE ALLOWED somebody  
covered the NO with scrap paper  
then scrawled ELOQUENT across it  
for us any disused word is only obsolete  
as the antiquarian placement of a current archaism  
we measure fame by its extent  
moments possess none Waller's paradox holds  
care for materials earns the work glory  
who write in sand whose use spites usage  
if a living tongue rewards present love  
with success hey biddable lover  
your generous scope's cashiered  
how to work once matter betrays art is the quandary

“THEY THAT HAVE POWER TO HURT AND WILL DO NONE”

where “world” means “people” life sometimes feels  
like an absurd conceit reified  
in brittle trinkets that not only don't  
correlate too objectively with an  
emotion one can recognize as real  
but also seem designed to flaunt self-love  
before all save those few who are *in*  
meantime John Adams' natural aristocracy  
(enlightenment wet dream if ever there was one)  
carries the burden of defense today  
as in Shakespeare's times nature or God  
lent out sums of excellence at interest  
on one hand and devoured Drake on the other  
coldly pure rank non-artistic lilywhite

“IF OUGHT OF OATEN STOP, OR PASTORAL SONG”

if poetry ever sharpens the mind's senses  
as in invocations at a banquet  
it pulls this off through operations all its own  
which have lots to do with the present past  
passing unnoticed before casual eyes  
and with painfully writing words on paper  
by hand and nothing to do with prevailing  
sense-data theory or with personal preference  
for avoiding answers that have no question  
yet once now and then poesy transports  
certain figures solitary amidst revelry  
into recurrent moods if not eternal  
paradise then at least ephemera  
wafts beyond an edge named William Collins

“HOW VAINLY MEN THEMSELVES AMAZE”

a traitor worm in the inverted tree  
of service to the state rots English oak  
shrewd career choices based on cold conclusions  
drawn from close scrutiny of how things tend  
will come to nothing lacking strong connections  
established by recorded action over time  
and the ability and will to exploit them  
for self advancement if not preservation  
tyrants as personalities dramatic  
though they be die and leave debris behind  
fealty even divided must go down  
one weathers out the storm or doesn't  
scarce thoughts without green shade for shelter stay  
green very long mind guards the garden so

“NO ROOFS OF GOLD O’ER RIOTOUS TABLES SHINING”

taking orders under ancient disciplines  
that most don’t know exist  
but that exact attention even to  
self-abnegating deeds of devotion  
won’t ameliorate setbacks and letdowns  
in an unreconstructed worldling’s life  
ascetics who cite cretonne and damask  
enjoy sensate relations with their deity  
which renders Earth an intellectual  
daydream and a reflective source of light  
when one is at one’s monkish best but O  
how suffering flesh comes back and with what force  
it returns one just like Richard Crashaw  
to all that is not poetry again

SUITE

1  
angels worship the law for its rectitude  
dim against tentflaps their pneuma wakes no one  
but an azure neon house style  
this was what my trip here is about  
apple anise rose thyme lemon  
fate does not stand to nature  
nature does not stand to kosmos  
come walk the corniche with me one more time  
before it’s time parzuf muntu anthropos  
all make up the paratge adab kalokagathia we talk  
our endarkenment erodes their cant into ipseity  
saber in the unstill vast your shawl  
drapes one shoulder as if it were night  
wind carved across a candid temple wall

2

I fold my sweatshirt adolescence subsides  
triage dignity  
it's not a regulation courtship  
no drastic personnel change goes down  
I abandoned such entanglements  
my rosciad shows they unravel  
as material culture crumbles into frippery  
if we don't require it to sustain life  
I need you to breathe air sweet or no  
manicured fingers dandle crystal stems  
in a wry vignette about rediscovering paradise  
told by kitchen candlelight over coffee  
louche litho perched amidst kitsch  
comes back with our talk illustrates shadows

3

outgrowth of montage art and snippet life  
assignation that became an escapade  
becomes a job now this professional  
demeanor counts its dosh then mopes and jeers  
wannabe who lays claim to competence  
cold glitzy icon falls from grace again!  
one hundred thousand tape loops flip at once!  
knockoff culprits of a bitchy distemper  
sister my spouse don't fuss we've gone  
with and without each other coveting  
moments so regret won't get near  
ignore poetastery as we do false love  
unhurt by either happier than both  
nothing erratic delight in our ways

4

don't you remember gestures at the shrine  
coax us away from queans and pontiffs  
whose permanent belle époque buzz wears off  
just as their glower power kicks in at dawn?  
sun outside swivels with tensile slowness  
snow lilac amber cobalt indigo coal  
trellised air scatters at midday  
I like how you dance when no one's looking  
crimson brass in pocket for keepsake  
the trace affection leaves is generosity  
finesse surprises us excess doesn't  
I take your hand you smile we go out  
get comfortable over a long weekend  
and turn our trysts into an engagement

5

fatigued or trampled into false sincerity  
braggadocio of the porkchop district  
deposits its vestige onto the half-dictions  
ultramodern ajar sans distance  
that would equal the real itself  
instead actuality puts on skits  
no one in the cast and crew gets wise to  
an idyll crammed with fustian  
against their cheese reading Stendhal your image  
crystallizes stoneblossoms encrust it  
courtesy game vapor weakness  
okay I love you this way too lyric  
spring rites engender neoclassical  
also romantic feeling first we are archaic

6

rude foot soils the sofa with drift world tread  
lady these courtlings prate gulled by lucre  
for what but sullen vaunts or cap-and-thanks  
the gluey venal trap the slick civic verglas  
tell a dumb chronicle about how style columns give dome  
the gizmo is kaput, grand mishap?  
appear live surveil and be surveyed  
whatever, I stay near not "on it anyway"  
model my haecceity idea on Ryan's rococo empiricism  
an oneirometric art it craves no nodge  
cité des dames nation of petticoats  
wing shape overhangs a cuneate leaf  
shades the slipper top of her naked foot  
then flutters off almost without moving

## EPHECTIC DRIFT

you sit in the garden  
silent sketching beds  
calla lily big leather  
bound carnet on lap  
piece takes shape  
one line per touch  
marks of such gentleness  
no breeze disturbs any leaf  
your glance flits from the sheet  
to a patternless jumble  
of vicissitude where  
creation never lives  
then back again  
quick eye sure hand

## PAWKY

how rebellious!  
does it hate me?  
what's this all about  
words should be spoken  
but these are hard  
getting the feeling  
nobody can grasp  
makes you kinda  
wanna act mean  
then try hard  
or never catch on  
no fair art is part of life  
everyone's an artist!  
I just won't read it.

## IN THE ANAGOGY

inside the hobbled smith's open forge  
differs from his wares as he hawks them  
teeming at every time on Earth anyplace  
Clarke's heart is Whitmanic his head Dantescan  
we live where the common need for beauty  
gets thwarted by a truth so full of dull  
eternities no present tension remains  
psyche copes shunts us aside under one notion  
whose sovereign is a monarch named Opinion  
contraries contend an isolato personage  
convenient to misrule of empire  
seems a fit emblem limning our plight  
but that's insane unclean not healthful  
one's informed self goes public the poem its text

## AROUND THE SILENCES

The “natural” man sure wears funny clothes. — Carrie Hunter

Paul Blackburn illuminated three dozen texts  
once for all with exactitude and charm  
poems gloss scholarship OK he don't mind  
finally it isn't easy to decide  
if lunatic enthusiasm for the postures of resentment  
turned his thoughts out in pidgin tatters  
torn at hazard from a refined vulgate  
that he could never parse too long  
or if chaste love for “the casual fall of language”  
sets up reverse echoes ringing bitterness  
either way what else did the vaquero hat  
and T'ang beard repulse if not modernity  
which isn't so much artificial as boring  
who doesn't resolve beckons for form

## AREAL MODES

dusk alcove copper bowl refuge photo  
ocean plaster not sea stucco Pacific  
Man's formal fragments earnestly dissemble  
human interest lingua franca star drift  
in a dead heat of dealerships sincere  
charlatans sarcastic clout freaks  
insolvent moguls street corner tycoons  
sport the same Politburo gofer's grimace  
and speak the same Office Baroque with gusto  
in slow chill currents a Mohammedan  
diabolism courses through the poems  
Duncan McNaughton writes as acid bites  
down into gouges etched on Whistler plates  
splenetic pinup mordant anti-Fed epopt

## ROSCIAD

in "Somebody Blew Up America"  
*Israelis* is the term a national  
ity but then in "The Forgetting" *Jews*  
occurs a cultural designation  
not quoting the other poem simply lying  
not only about what one person wrote but  
what two words mean thus what all  
words mean corruption spreads a process  
called Favor-and-Reward makes men of letters  
like Robert Pinsky men of cardboard  
far cry from the sensitivity  
of his book about Walter Savage Landor  
Amiri Baraka's intricacy and groove  
are something anyone can get with

## STILL RENDEZVOUS

a cold sunlit garden — F.T. Prince

immoderate greatness how many dawns  
none other like when we drank Glenfiddich  
talked across Rollins' span to Williamsburg  
as open rebellion broke out in the Colonies  
Edmund Burke addressed the House of Commons  
"sirs you shut their ports annihilated  
their charter governed them by an army  
this it is which has burnt New York  
planted bayonets in the bosom of that city  
where your wretched government once boasted  
the only friends she could number in America"  
a quote I think Ed Dorn will appreciate  
when next we pay respects why pester him  
till then the labors of dissent fall to us

## ATARAXIA

Tom Clark's humility inheres in words  
he sets down without straining their prose sense  
unduly even if this tweaks line-ends  
or irks a sensibility aware  
modern Romance entails something besides  
genre work and head trips to be mocked  
namely the useful intensity of pathos  
disinterest is a cardinal sin where conflict  
of interest is the Machiavellian edict  
faux naïf strategy turns bumpkin steez  
and back again with alarming swiftness  
the unbounded compassion his urbanity  
encloses within shapes known as The Line  
survives those platitudes which tally it

## HOMENAJE A PADILLA

whatever any slob thinks signifies, but what?  
we call an image of this muddle "sublime"  
welcome shout ornate bannisters' damp joinery  
welcome hum the unpruned groves in doleful blossom  
welcome low fronds whisper alongside  
pool gates backlit by an emerald lamp  
you are now leaving the shadow  
commodity aesthetics casts upon art  
and entering the soul's vindication lay!  
drakes graze wine sloshes over their bodies  
olive branches scrape aqueduct tops  
a regicide peace, you can hear it, see it  
Havana vanities come to dust in Miami  
waters blanket his casque and rusty spear

## BULWARK IN EXPANSE

the “anguished” dispute Is it hot or cold?  
won't be settled by thermodynamics  
rhapsodia doesn't produce the void  
doesn't conduce no poetry sorbet  
nor bbq exists ever instead  
importunate words rush from any source  
no sooner have they got out than each asks  
What am I doing here? at a caffè  
table swept along rapt by writing like  
Scrivani telling us about the senescence  
of Venice and the Italian custom of  
making up couplets out loud so rhyme rich  
is that tongue hence also Montale's clipped  
vowels never florid an acerb tercet

## GLAM SQUAD

the early-nineties death mask started to peel  
we stitched on some chevrons, teal & puce  
without anesthetic  
our work looked great  
then we blundered into a fable  
fully furnished with market categories  
got a taste of who the boys are into  
alluring objects crowded the flickering gloom  
so you “dug” them, big deal  
what distracts us at our washstand  
is the perfect distress “a careful  
negligence” as Ben puts it  
bus driver has not learned use of brake pedal  
synth pink dusk

## MEDIUM TEDIUM

at my back for decor the epochal tattoo  
of billyclub against plexi  
an active cynic who flourishes on disorder  
confined for life to this simplistic order  
whose princes sneer off the walls through square aureoles  
I watched stock identities appear  
exotic who strip naked and show off  
victimhood i.e. merchandise  
my eminence front looked like what it was  
caught in the pale gleam of garish weapons  
that lost their tarnish each time I called a truce  
every mirror's hung up on something by someone  
darkness and light are both alike  
whatever tool is too detailed I wield

## VERY SPECIAL GUEST

appearances transpire in lieu of a sweet vernacular  
petition which addresses signatories  
let hype smirk its way up to the bottom  
passing poetry as cause célèbre  
on the nod calls steel breezes forth  
I can always make career suicide a virtue  
drop leaflets over benighted fields that don't read  
the Times like the involuntary poets  
Eluard and Micheline would if they were me  
who crease the mouth who slit the eyes  
where furious color dispels a watchful fog  
who outfit love against life deathly dreaming  
the lowdown alive share the rest are japes  
of love as some are slaves of freedom

## LORD STEWARDESS

upon clean cocktail napkins I indite  
strophes to the miserable and luxurious  
first class coach passengers who come  
on to me in their sodden sleep and come  
together with me afterwards in mine  
a massive undercurrent of emotion rides  
over my least general remark I notice  
only either one thing or the other always  
skimming the glossies like I had a hand  
in love besides this which I employ  
diverting fellow humans from sore trials  
of heart and toils of head gladly but still  
expecting as we work for work to increase  
pleasure instructive past bodies' release

## EXPECTANT

Eve seeks Adam must love animals gods  
machines never the irritable human  
construed from humus as the Hebrew has it  
ungendered till division then enclosure  
threatens to unite us once again  
pay your dues don't act the punk look out  
for a break while you bide and see what side  
of the long con you're on yet never learn  
whyever "events" happen like they do  
look into every mug as if one cared  
speak with the unhinged without regard  
for nicknames you'd better name what is  
not true beautiful good real and thereby  
temper that sentimental fancy a bit

## LOVESCAPE

uneven shade like a thin wash on fine paper  
props vaultless sky over plateglass the color of purgatory  
an Angeleno palette remains autumnal, frostbitten  
some seasons St Ives squints Florentine  
azure neon proves life still gets high someplace  
no fixed relation no long cold line of sun  
no repose nothing lonely there never is  
just Baxter Northup in the aureate air  
I can't make out from my bungalow veranda  
what studio copywriters life deals with otherwise  
morale turns septic not citric new suit or old  
john stall where youth and beauty pass away  
celestial bodies breed showmantic bluster in fools why  
we each felt the rest were in a dream the whole time

## ROOTS OF HYPNOS

the publishing house tax writeoff quota  
develops its own imperatives and cues  
book deal hounds who play along  
so an art object fabrication specialist  
can turn out industry standard verbal product  
with glib untruth and boring sameness  
and readers can reinvent a petty bourgeois leisure ideal  
of poetry consumption as status manufacture  
contrariwise if beauty is love of form  
as courage is love of fate then disorder  
has a use beyond refuge from conformists  
brand loyalty doesn't bind or divide us  
integrity means you deal with conditions  
the plural usurps terms and adjusts groups

## RECENSION

a federal democratic republic nation state  
with centralized power whose sovereign  
reserves justice can coerce anybody  
but within imagination no realm is real  
save those of its own making and yet  
Denver Chicago San Francisco Boston  
Iowa City it's the one inside joke  
magazines run coursework as poems  
then the phratry splinters  
in an atmosphere of fatalism and blackmail  
doctrinaire friends to indifferent fortune  
rehearse slogans control deliria  
prose officialdom scrub celebrity  
it matters how we treat each other

## FLYTING

like in a testy politico's populist delirium  
an undeclared war whose outbreak went unremarked  
suspends the codes of civilized behavior  
ridiculous attempt at public insult ensues  
wreckage of clarity in golden hindsight  
look it's latchkey solitude versus enforced isolation!  
what's the wonder we hew to outworn pop junk fealty  
against lay determinism and stylish apartheid  
erotomania jostles us to subtend the aristoi  
elegant obscenity dupes even our most eloquent vulgarian  
crapulous heads cluttered with farrago wax sullen  
blind carbon settles for crypto proof in a pinch  
cut loose we graze spikes of a black rose waning  
and shazaam you're a smart cookie among the big dogs

## PASQUINADE

as on the uptight pages of an emulous diarist  
clique life subs in for cohesion  
that never got lost to begin with  
and out-sulks Pandemonium itself  
the forms of instinct aren't archetypal myth  
just so much drama in the pop sense  
schmaltz dirty looks video brawls  
during a black nite of the body  
when colors all to wight are cast  
the tale is what's told from what's lived  
no matter we beg our loves' forgiveness  
having hypostatized some phase of it  
lucky thing few lives will do for art  
reading ours would've made even us yawn

Also available from Bird & Beckett:

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