

## And Then Something Happened

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Previous publications:

Poetry

*Aleatory Allegories* (Salt)

*Memory Cards & Adoption Papers* (Potes & Poets Press)

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*A Poetics of Impasse in Modern and Contemporary*

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(Alabama)

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*to Sangha*



## Contents

THE PHILOSOPHER'S CHILD	1
Part One	3
The Philosopher's Child	3
Early Memoir	5
Another Childhood	7
Part Two	16
Declensions of Is	16
Contradictory Passions	19
Old Gloves	23
Nike's Song	26
Psalms	29
Drive ME	31
Weeknights At the Piano Bar	33
Part Three	36
The Lost Country	36
ADDENDA	49
MATERIAL LYRICS	75
Part One	77
Creative Memory Consultant	77
Ephemera	78
Moon Down	79
Vocalissimus	80
Hot Hot Hot	81
Material Lyric	82
Toy Story	83
Jurassic Tech	84
Truck Stop Fugue	85

Attached	86
Part Two	88
City of Ghosts	88
No Guns, No Durian	89
Enron Field	90
Shut-Lip	91
Sons and Lovers	92
Poison Pen	93
Intifada / Incursion	94
The Dotted Line	95
Natural Child	96
Katherine Harris in paradise	97
Out Right Plants	98
Kashmir	99
Le Petit Train	100
Native Son	101
Bio-imitation	102
Imitation bio	103
Birth Stories	104
Rink Rage	105
The New York School	106
Design	107
Fish Hide Rock	108
Punchline	109
Before the Next War	110
At the Tone	111
Scrapbooking	112
Rooms	113
Our Daily Homonym	114

Nosferatu Speaks	115
A Child Goes Forth	116
Exhibition Guide	118
Inaugural Lecture	119
Repetition Compulsion	121
AND THEN SOMETHING HAPPENED	123



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# The Philosopher's Child



## PART ONE

### The Philosopher's Child

In the year of the snake, rivers  
flowed circuitously to sea ; desire  
for revenge filled the populace  
with an inverse longing for balance  
at any cost, like a field of grasses  
that appeared only when the death  
camps closed. Rabbits fled  
the deadly suburbs, leaving only  
a slight afterglow of gentleness ;  
theirs was an intermingled music  
of chaos and counterpoint.  
A dog walked these last streets,  
and his memory brought him back  
to a gutted house, stranded  
in the white heat of a late sun.  
Tigers roamed the city; through  
the jawless face of the Central  
Bank, I saw an ox run away, past  
the monkey's mad graffiti, his paintings  
of a lake country where trees leaned  
waterward with maternal intent ;  
a boar fell in love with this country  
and longed to take his family there.  
The rooster was not inclined  
to accept this outcome, wanting  
to ruffle his feathers against  
a backdrop of rubble and waste,  
unaccustomed to color and the rainbow  
destiny of rain ; so he sealed a pact  
with the horse, whose legs carried  
her through this antique city ;  
its gates were the wrecks of gas

stations, pumps standing like sentinels  
over broken windows and abandoned cars.  
Only the rat felt at home; his larder  
was stocked with old butter, bread crusts,  
curdled milk, and old asparagus heads;  
the screams of children rang in his ears  
like songs, earth warm with the residue  
of fires, and that absentee landlord,  
Sun, turned his dull eye elsewhere.

Here one couldn't distinguish origin  
from end, history from the sublime  
moment of its disappearance, slow  
armageddon of artificial suns  
and the sweet breath of dragons.  
These sent their radiance back  
to an imagined source, and their mouths  
bloomed open like peonies. Horoscopes  
told of a year of turmoil and strange  
happiness, as of days past grief, the new  
world opening to a redemptive clangor  
of carnivals, now lodged at the city's edge,  
where barkers and clowns called out. One  
small child gave answer, waving from the burnished  
frame of a burned out window, her tears  
a kind of reverence expressed as interrogative.

## Early Memoir

Back to these warm layers the sun sheds,  
cloaks flung over volcanic rock.  
In the sensible city no horns  
sound; the breeze these days is  
blank. Definitions aren't adequate,  
endings without closure,  
the thousand murmurings of lava flowing  
to the sea on its own terms, veiled  
by salt steam. No priest appears,  
just the pastoral loneliness of waters  
and a moon's prophetic stare, hanging  
on a string that binds the heavens,  
if only we care to look. Somewhere in  
the conjunction of astronomy and astrology,  
pure description and imposed narrative,  
it's possible to know more than the mirrors  
at the end of the driveway tell us.  
A plane descends over ocean  
and I hope to name it before the buzzer  
sounds and someone else claims  
my prize, closing down storefronts  
as another story of revelation  
and redemption teases us  
with its negative to white, a bedazzlement  
accorded those who see life as itself,  
no more than a script about temptation,  
the messiah a product of our finest  
schools. No one knows the rules, but all  
may surmise that they exist as members  
of the beautiful consortium each new  
year portends or pretends.

In my ever more to be imagined past  
I felt weather not as external  
process — the puppet-work of gods—but

located inside a theater where I played,  
inventing a climate appropriate  
to my mood, be it dry or wet, like  
a Greek soul. Regrets take their place  
in this panoply, and fools begin  
to resemble me, lined up as  
photos on the grand piano, flat  
emblems of passage, like church icons.  
I suspect transcendent realities *are*  
flat, pressed in a scrapbook awaiting  
captions. The past is a well, and baby  
Jessica has fallen in, a soft  
stone, fearing nothing but time's  
lower limit—not the metaphor I  
wanted, where linear time is a rain  
forest adjacent to a desert, and I  
can walk from one to the other. Even  
as a child I wanted to write memoirs,  
knowing geography is geometry  
and the planes that razor space  
mean more than abstraction suggests—  
the gods' gossip, eventually  
reduced to the one voice  
we hear over wires, and yearn to know  
repeated, children awaiting sleep.  
In my dreams I knew witches and foul  
instances of newspaper tragedies  
brought to fact, professing only  
to see a carnival I relinquish  
to the redemptive energies of the last  
camel to the right, now snorting and stomping  
its approval of the genie's new tax cut.

## Another Childhood

And what if the poem actually is  
the cause of our confusions, not outlet  
or even inlay, the taut mosaic  
of a million tiles that absorbs logic  
like a sponge? Then to write the poem  
is to participate in the problem  
of expression raised to the nth degree,  
and I become a conscious thief,  
ransacking the hoard for words to fling  
against a wall where syntax  
and semantics fulfill their own  
agenda. If there are no more  
actors, how can there be speeches  
and printed panels, and ourselves  
shuttling between a private  
and a public display that's meant  
to relieve us of hurt, before  
the language turns in upon  
itself, the body speaking  
only to its own, unelaborated  
multitudes inventing democracy  
as an unrefined chaos, like  
anything that speaks only to  
and through itself. For form is  
body, and whatever we say about it  
becomes it, as the barnacle  
becomes the ship to which it  
adheres, and silence occurs  
even on the hill where buses make  
a symphony out of first gear. Any-  
thing can be particularized, as  
even the densest freeway noise  
approximates a baritone on the alto  
edge; whatever we remake makes  
way for other versions of chaos.

Even these cello suites defy  
logic on some level, clouds  
that spill into Haleakala crater  
like waterfalls or a genie's  
steam escaping the bottled sky,  
so that metaphor (the very act  
of it) is also a form of dis-  
order, as comparisons are  
never safe. The lonely man walks  
the strand, calling to crows  
to hear a song of his magical  
solitude; of course, it's as  
rotten a state as any,  
its virtues all trade-ins on  
the old transcendental model. I'm not  
sure what our categories do for us  
any more—what's a flying fish, now?  
aside from spawning the necessary  
arguments over “meaning” and “method.”

All is melodious, this lack  
or luck by which one sees the world  
and its words as the same singular  
being, a caress of the ear and I'm  
off, and I love the air that fills  
my room with possible travels,  
the world's envelope a mere excuse  
for sending messages to sea, the  
inebriate and wandering ocean  
so far past naming it seems free  
and asks us to join on its own  
terms, whose contract is open.  
Think of the phone calls Thoreau