

Aleatory Allegories

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SUSAN M. SCHULTZ



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for Bryant, retro-actively

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Part One

Mothers and Dinosaurs, Inc.

In any case, if a strike's
called, you'll have to leave
home, all but your platitudes,
that is, base camps of camaraderie,
macho at the heart of passed time—
if it's considered national,
or natural: bagpipes
remind me we're all ethnics,
at least those men who wear
skirts are, not to skirt
the subject, but puns do tell
us something, who's on first,
that is, or who flicks the switch,
beats the clock to bed. What
ifs are history's best stories,
which even those in pin-stripes
knew as they logged in runs and
dodged questions. Panels convene
on such matters, weigh evidence
and tip their salary caps;
to the victors go the stats.
Quilting bees are left uncounted,
organized patchworks of cloth
and words, wise yarns that bind
an avenue of strangers. Not national
these binders of the unsewn,
unseen reapers of rags (ladders
where they start not found
in romantic scrapbooks filled
with might-have-beens or maudlin
trades at Peter's gate, where
I'm told this story ends).

I'll confess a need for origins,
even those bought from catalogues,
though knowing my grandmother's
skin was soft produces affect

only in inverse proportion to
her presence, dignity's distance
on a midwest veranda, before
I knew the words for place
or providence. That's ideology,
no doubt, the self's precarious
cartographer; now I see beauty's
often no more than fragility
realized. Know sentiment
strongest when least held to,
like books sold at auction
whose very pages smelled
Shakespearian. Time, like its
objects, is vain—glorious
too the way it spells
its name, the crook of early
English f's, frail teamwork
of double-s's built into
systems as the lack thereof.
Now that's democracy, saith
the prig, aware of a process
made possible only in computer
versions of actual diamonds
in the rough. Who gets cut is
a team's prerogative, but
who remains is pure accident,
fired synapses returning
to their farm team as memory's
final loss. The borders open,
doubt's traffic synoptic, and
adoration's tagged as mutual
recognition. At strike's end
soliloquies will bloom again,
as to dust we return, rounding second.

Oceanic Feeling

The ocean is never itself,
variation on a constancy that can't
exist save as an abstraction of the thousand
waves arrested each hour by black rock,
a coastline whose boundaries are only
more slow to drift and crumble, earth's
pirouette acknowledged
as a faithful precursor to the end.

Recurrence of pattern is confinement,
though it gives us words for what we
know of ourselves; the chambers in our
hearts hide within the ribs' cave
like a nautilus. How I recognize myself
in this tendency toward an abstract
person whose motives are an ocean
of reserve, fragility rewritten as depth
of purpose, meditation. What if my
desire for solitude is a screen,
now grown problematic in my love
for another's child, a little boy
whose "Play Time!" needs no
consistencies in this life, or any
other? A sermon on deliverance figures in
to this propulsion to and fro, sacred
time secret, no doubt also to the angels
half of all Americans believe actual.
A scrape of wings is what I need
to feel unearthly, and though my past
lives are those of memory, I've out-
flanked them on every side, if only
to give them comfort. The afterworld
cannot be a happy place, though rents
are low, and views are invariably
good, since "after" implies passage from
consistency into a space where longing
breeds itself out of the absence

of contradiction; it's my job to ferret out inconsistencies so they can be resolved, and later spawned again.

Time is only the forum for these arguments that seek their ends in sentences that contain not just nouns and verbs, but also a syntax resistant to the modifiers that dangle like ripe avocados, thuds against my roof reminding me of shots or warning signals, without clear symptoms of what I'm warned against. Is it art, or real danger that confronts me when I leave my white house to forage among the witnesses of this world to find another? Haven of my youthfulness and strident memories of an altered mind that turned the sky inside out, gray sock laced with poison. Remembrance can be liberation, though without certain end, immune to fresh incursions of unadulterated confusion, power outage of our every faith, and hope. And what I feel again is sometimes more and less stark than long walks in rain, counting my fellows by their persistence, step after step toward a peculiar inward stasis. I shall take this pattern and hold it like a frame, to see what lies outside, equally framed, but not by me. Time to measure chaos as a noun left out of sentences whose courage is to form new patterns in the patter of a child's feet on the concrete walk.

Promised Notes

Those with wings performed their stupid
angel tricks, inebriate godsends (quite
literally) who know to find their god
beside the Pizza Hut, undistracted by
the frenzy of quick delivery artists
and those whose hands grip plexiglass
mugs, faithful to fellowship wherever
found. It's not that we lack meaning,
nor are we overcharged by its meter
(ask not for whom the bell tolls)
but that in our search we've mislaid
solace in the scrutiny of shells and
packs of cigarettes. To see the green
flash enables us to boast of larger
visions than malls accommodate, but
is that not accident that reasons us
to sleep, alert to the hum of moped
and dove (I saw two lean together under
eaves this past torrential rain) rather
than wisdom acquired through practice?

I cannot rest easy, or hard, in any
sense of the scriptural contract or covenant,
encountering only once the impress of goodness
on disappearance those days we waited
hours and nights not to wait, but to know
the journey gone as surely as it had been.
Such is the way we have of trusting time
that only takes—even in the beaded turns
of a boogie boarder screwing around before
his fall: surf's moods chaotic, lace factories
visited on by terrorists, Irish or otherwise.
Metaphor contains in itself the profane
wisdom we suspect of a holy man, his feet
wet with runoff from cattle pastures,
hence the pastoral view the reverent retain
in the face of earth's inadequacies, faults

and winds that take the roofs off success.
I am so certain I stand, when I stand, that
my casting no shadow two days a year—and only
in the tropics—can't alarm my suspicions,
though I'd rather see Hannibal's elephant
leading me over the alps of my comfort zone,
brusque vines descending the overhangs, beards
without their bards, the instantiation of poetry
a waste of time only. Apart from that the zoo
encloses but cannot achieve the delirium
necessary to find our way around the obstacles
that are soda machines as well as cardinals,
these yoked ideologies no more aligned than
the new system by which we divide our teams,
as if geography made more sense than alphabets.

I always wondered at the atlas's fine
deviations from topography, the odd pairings
of Arkansas with Alaska, New this with New
that. An arbitrary happiness is elicited by
dissonance, and the wit that blows the fuses
or ruses rings out like catalpas or eclectic
bands tuned to an inordinant pitch pleasing
more to dogs than to ourselves. To say little
of this child whose spirit alerts mine to
its delight in particulars, like string wound
around ankles, to be abstracted later in poems
meant solely for outside consumption. Audiences
exist on e-mail as nowhere else, composed (if
that's the word) of impulse only, and who's
to know how words escape us when we cannot
see whom we mean to touch in anger, or in love.

The days are over for false consciousness,
flare of sounds attuned to other sounds
and not to the locations or terminals
of our words and deeds. The years bring us out,
extravagant, onto boulevards, and it's only
on the maps that we see them laid side by side.
The boy who's six and a half can't
see us looking at him, as we do at all that
promises to follow us, green flash or late aria.

Budget Cuts

Morning's latter layoff, witness
to embroidered agnostic willfulness;
implore god's revelatory flare, flat
erasure of, gridlock meaning space
shuttle inures stars to static clones
of rigid geometries. Ransom recollection!
Return to safe houses despised as such,
or suchlike resumé of fact disguised
as plot: move not, lest ye be approved
by dairy boards or redundant ruminant
cows. Farm loans lag where barn doors
sag: needful chorus lacks tenor, nay
vehicle, pick up truck music to love
by, with. Stiffs rejoin, amidst this
loss of state or status, as Mohammed
descends the Raleigh mount, munificent
if stern, stage weary, knowing symbolic
value ain't what it used to be. Beatific
one, you with the long legs, aware
the wanderer escaped one ode only
to find another, whence Grendel's arm
did circus tricks and dinosaurs pooped
fossils in the hard regimes of air.
This once, easiness is no virtue, though
sought in uttered decades, ecstatic
palms pivoting, ambassadors upstaged
in Herculean wonderments of ought.
Old words have it, that cachet
that bends on installment, albatross
not scrivened yet as gesture
or ink blot, hinged as corporate kites.
I'd speak them, if not for warp or woof;
neighbor dogs' instinctual ruts retain
usefulness as hounds. Pat or not, phrases
construct their books, forgiving fines.
That very spring you left, I strayed.

Earthquake Dreams

These synonyms that rhyme astound sense
with their disclosure repetition is more
than insistence, is also distance from
a source transcribed as syncopation
of real time and artificial semblance,
history's wobble toward no fixed point
but what is measured by the origin
and end of seismographs. There's room
for another in this bubble, whose
view is ginger and broad leaves, and
whose air allows the chug of motor
and siren scream their resonance,
until I perceive what seems enclosed
in a shifting permanence like words
or hyperactive kids. These mornings
I abandon time for sense, mind
hovering like a parasailor between
clouds and shadows that turn the sea
into itself, more than ever private
"to a fault." The constancy of unfulfilled
desire becomes a kind of pivot on which
to calibrate the fine engine of love
and detachment. I look for that sense
of things being as they must be
that the zen practitioner finds in
long afternoons; his haunches' ache
giving access to a foyer where pain
waits out immanence. No security
clearance is needed to leave this
house, nor its soul's simile, just
a willingness to privilege some
information, bribe the guards whose
vocation is distraction. The ground
of reasoning is inoperative, like
the solid earth, whose utterances
we mean to record in phrase books:
The mountains want to join together;

*There's too much pressure on the faults;
L.A. intends to be where San Francisco is—
an allegory whose Everyman recognizes
only broken freeways as the path
to an epicenter that is ourselves.*