

Source Codes

SUSAN WHEELER's first collection of poetry, *Bag 'o' Diamonds* (University of Georgia Press), received the Norma Farber First Book Award of the Poetry Society of America and was short-listed for the Los Angeles Times Book Award. Her second, *Smokes*, with an afterword by Robert Hass, received the Four Way Books Prize for 1998. Her awards include fellowships from the John Simon Guggenheim Foundation and the New York Foundation for the Arts, and her work has appeared in six editions of the Scribner anthology *Best American Poetry*, and in *The Paris Review*, *New American Writing*, *Talisman*, *The New Yorker* and other journals. On the graduate faculty in creative writing at the New School and the creative writing faculty at Princeton University, she has also taught at the University of Iowa, New York University and Rutgers University. She lives in New York City.

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To Jonathan and Lisa
Beyond genes —

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One

When the wind shifts, the dirt — uh, earth — kicks
up. It skirts the pages of the catalogues

that line the steel link, it scarifies the retina, it
scumbles up the new gas line in Mr. Rodriguez's

R.V. I see you levitate before you risk the
plunge. Swinging into the western blast, the screen

door sings although the brothers oiled it — gone
to flaxseed, gone to hay — afore the late moon dis-

appeared. The crux is alive at the fork of me, in
a particulate breeze that rakes. *Ai-ay-ai-ee*

the prairie hums, *ai-ay-ai-ee* — as if this filtering
dandled, upswung thing could hear it sing,

as if the particles of the earth were populate,
as if each trailed a self in the whining wind,

—— *what?* the self that is you interjects. *Let's*
get the roadside back in view. It's just Lester's

daft mutt Seagram's grave the winds kicked
up. He'd had him spayed cockeyed is how it's

told, and ever doting dug him there. We reassert
the selves but the Seagrams of the earth they

sift us with silt no mind our gear in a wind that takes
going off to heart, or what heart a silt self has

in the greater earth it constitutes. *Go get the truck*
you say and then the band picks up.

Two

Up late. The sleep has stopped.
And I have looked through every page —
 a quantity, nine ninety three
 shelved here — by the right referee Muldoon
to find the quartet he recommends. No luck.

C sharp minor wins the toss. Then insouciance
Rots in the belly of this week,
 the *ange* leading Willem Dafoe
 into betrayal of — we're at the brink.
To be protected by! Or die —

So rite two will round me up at Oprah's hour.
 (Twelve yet to go.) Forecast: haze,
 bright. Benign summer heat.
Shoes and paws plodding the streets,
unawares — like you, my sweet,

unawares the string can take time off
 off-line, like any shit. (Air Time: the girl
sings mom the jingle about cellophane,
 the cello that profanes the strings
or cell phones with internal rings.)

This quartet. I've chosen wrong before.
Its turkey tangled in its straw bears up
 its matted appetite. Weeks ago, the tackle
drove sleep off — Mind's got no bite, limp
 when limpid's required by this rite.

A scanner, the brain, cum Cronenberg,
netted jetsam swelling fast — steam-table
 Sargasso drek, auditorium, panelists,
— or bedroom of the wed. The head's
 a hat upon the neck. Thus have we bred.

I wish us — me — Regarding
where I've been, the scrimmage, the
pull and push, well finally —
clear free. But enmeshed is what we get
for violet acts undertook. Bound up in

that what plucked us from the sea.
Fuck my will, fuck yours as well — (only
eleven keys to go by dawn.
It's night's summer, hot, still, blank as cheese.)
(Or does O's book club meet at four?

Righted by then, whole, and sleeping in?) If
there's a life outside parentheses,
let me there go. Amen.

Three

A man
walked into a
bar carrying his sheaf
of poems. *Whaddaya have*, the bar
keep said.

The man
had had it with
drink. *An audience would
help*, he whined, and the bar's patrons
rushed for

the loo.
*Let me give you
a slice of advice*, the
bar keep said. *Lay low – memorize
your best*

*and when
they least expect,
shoot*. The man creased his sheets
on the bar, damned his memory.
It's shot

to shit,
he said. The keep
turned back to polishing
his glasses and thought, *enough with
advice*.

A man
with a hat the
size of Cleveland strode in –
Not another one. The other
drinkers

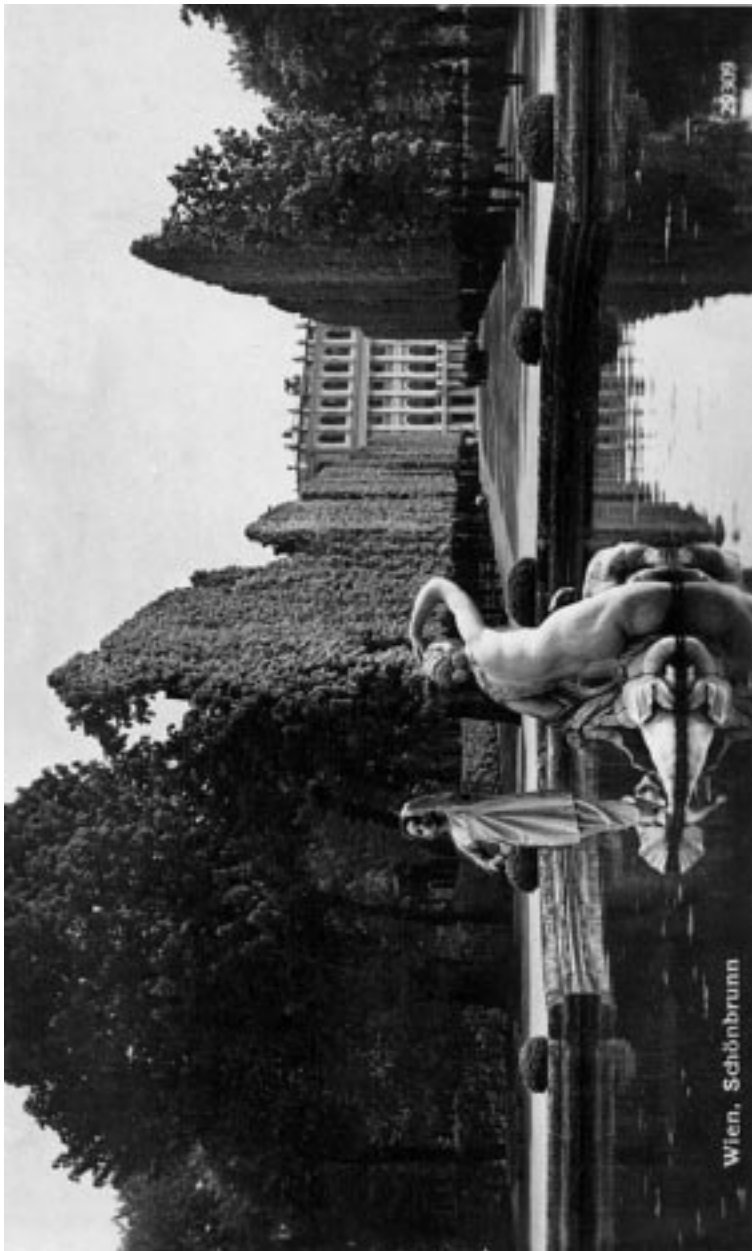
returned
to the bar from
the john. *Whaddaya have*
and the hat said, *Glenfiddich. Neat.*
Now that's

a good
patron, the keep
said to the man who was
at his own verse, distraught. *Note well.*
You won't

see a
better. Drinkers
clumped about the hat like
batter on a spoon. A man left
a bar

with his
sheaf of poems.
Harder and harder it
gets to stay sober, harder and
neater.

Four



Five

The thinnest meal on the slightest isle
Sustains but poorly. So: the file
Of men and women, mile and mile,

In consult with the wizened bat.
Plumes and boas're where it's at —
She won't remember saying that.

If hunger takes them to the coast,
They find a spectacle to toast.
Or several of their peers to roast.

Those that make it to the south
Are lucky to live thumb to mouth.
They might prefer the Catamount

Where greenish mountains freeze the nuts.
Though scavenging is an art that's bust
The ravenous can be beauty sluts.

Those lucky few who do adduce
The food that keeps them from the noose
Will crave on, too. Produce, produce.



Seven

The death of peace is no literature.

Leisure is death without letters.

Death is without the leisure of letters.

A lettrist's death is without peace.

The dead woman of leisure is without literature.

The death of literature is tranquillity.

Dead litterati have no rest.

Without literature, peace is death.

Literature: death without peace.

Eight





Ten

Every lover admires his mistress

eyes
looks like a squis'd cat
awry
heavy
mammis
two double jugs
she have filthy
breed lice
very monster
dowdy
obscene
he love her once

errors or imperfections of body or mind, Ipsa haec delectant
lover admires his mistress, though she be very deformed of herself
a swollen juggler's platter face, or a thin
have clouds in her face, be crooked
mammis, her dugs like two double jugs
that other extreme, bloody-fallen fingers
she have filthy, long unpared nails
back, she stoops
very monster, an oaf imperfect
dowdy, a slut
obscene, base
he love her once, he admires her for all this

every lover admires his mistress
ill-favored, wrinkled, pimpled, pale
having a swollen juggler's platter
clouds in her face
be crooked, dry, bald, goggle-eyed
looks like a squis'd cat, hold her
eyed, black or yellow about the eye
hook-nosed, have a sharp fox-nose
simo patuloque, a nose like a prom