

The Sense Record

JENNIFER MOXLEY was born in 1964 and grew up in San Diego, California. As an adult she has lived in Seattle, San Francisco, Providence and Paris. From 1992–1995 she edited *The Impercipient*, a stapled & photocopied magazine dedicated to publishing the work of her contemporaries. Following this venture she co-edited, with her long-time partner Steve Evans, *The Impercipient Lecture Series*, a monthly poetics pamphlet. She has also served as the poetry editor for *The Baffler* magazine since 1997. In addition to her US, Canadian, and British publications, her poetry has been translated into Norwegian, Czech, Swedish and French. Presently she lives in Orono, Maine where she works as an Assistant Professor at the University of Maine.

also by Jennifer Moxley

Books

Imagination Verses (Tender Buttons)

Évidence des Lumières (Créaphis)

Other publications

The First Division of Labour (Rosetta Chapbook)

Wrong Life (Equipage Chapbooks)

Enlightenment Evidence (Rem • Press)

Works of translation

The Translation Begins by Jacqueline Risset (Burning Deck)

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JENNIFER MOXLEY



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To Keith for Yeats

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Acknowledgments

Of the poems in this volume, “Stem of the Tree of Orestes,” “A Transom Over Death’s Door,” “Where Was I Going,” “Fear of an Empty Life,” “The Second Winter,” “Æolian Harp,” “Soleil Cou Coupé,” “Fixed Idea,” “The Easter Lesson,” and “The Lock” appeared together as the chapbook *Wrong Life* published by Equipage. “Behind the Orbits” was originally published by Oasia Broadsides and “Impervious to Starlight” by Backwoods Broadsides. “The Occasion” was originally published as a Belladonna pamphlet. Some poems in this volume were also included in the following anthologies: *Line Reading: Anthology One, 2000–2001*, *Postwar American Poetry: The Mechanics of the Mirage* and *Vanishing Points: An Anthology of New Modernist Poetry*. Other poems appeared in the following magazines, to which grateful acknowledgment is here made: *Angle*, *Cello Entry*, *Explosive*, *Faucheuse*, *fragmente*, *Jacket*, *nearSouth*, *Pressed Wafer*, *Sal Mimeo* and *Quid*.

The Sense Record

To be is better than not to be. To
Live—

LOUIS ZUKOFSKY

Grain of the Cutaway Insight

I can not thwart
Suspicion.
For what old law
 reputes to this, or any other
chain
of inept similes, vague images,
 “the general Truths”?
Those bold beliefs that Wordsworth’s
 spirited Grasmere boyhood
never seemed to
lack for . . . And if I doubt
 my willingness
to frustrate the love
 of human suffering
by casting out
diluted metaphor, to prove us more abased
 than those who lived

in simpler times, to turn our humanity,
childlike and bereft of all
heroic vision, into molecular dust
floating between those once manmade, now God-like
constructs
of cement and glass, as in
Of Being
Numerous,
it is because those cold materials,
rough and foreign against the skin,
remain my hill and dale, *no* abstraction
will make of them the ill-begotten
rock,
any more than nature-scapes record
the testament of cities,
wondrous places which soon drop
their moneyed origins and become *so like*

the natural course of things
that when they fall to ruins
they make a manuscript
in stone, precious by grace of the singular
hand, between
crumbling mortar and weed-filled walk
perceptible, a slow
methodical stir
shaping a template into the brick
of living, vigorous, energy.

Long lost friend, with whom I once
spoke into the night of books and
left, thinking to myself on my short
walk home of all the things I wanted so
to tell you

in a poem, I am lonely

in the in-*commiserate* word,
its small sound remains
an incipient dis-harmony
sounding through dissembled day's
would-be routinization.
My thoughts are too awkward, too erratic to rest
at ease in the beautiful iamb.
Wanting otherworldly
metrics, or the faith
to overcome, I still can remember
the promise of the gift, Captain Craig's dual
gratitudes, the sudden of taking
the larger of giving.
The poem therefore must be
a fit
condolence, a momentary
and ordered form of the emphatic

question, around which continues to gather,
despite habitual despair,
the moving
and needful Company of
thought, attentive
to existence, quiet and ever
perpetual.

A Transom over Death's Door

Redemptive definitions fixed in tension my control, or then I
Wandered blind, and there's the end, the deadened idea
Of the where and the when of it, no matter the works I've read
Word for word, within the Hall of Mirrors I saw prophetic
Charioteers pulled by roosters across a bloody painted sky,
Gilded myths for future tourists, protectors of the perpetual
Court of light, some other spring this might be ink
For wreckage; but who are the poor and who are the thieves
And who are the rich and who are the thieves, and who are
The friends who will later claim the rights of primogeniture
While you are thinking, yes, from image havoc pressed upon
Your present state of mind, the whole wide world by products
Pulled apart, some hollow personage destroying my supposed
Memories of girlhood in the suburbs, and Apollo, too much beauty,
Nonluminous bodies lit by the light of the ideational particle, Am I?
What if? Is resentment but a race of repetition I do not recognize
Myself within, unlike the minor key's harmonious dirge, the instant
Contentment of the appropriate sound unfolding to an isolate ear;
Could it be? The ambient blackmail of the bourgeoisie, dialogues
Threatened, were this a real war or maneuvers in limits, a slight
Rusty patch, I'd choose misunderstanding over anti-social
Tracts in which Truth, laurel-crested beauty of the skies, attacks
Our borders once again, enemy of the stories of the story's
Undoing, bi-polar canons of experience, the long hard fight for
The right to devour, what are we going to tell the old, wasted
Mind, the irritation behind what I could possibly feel, abnegation
Atop my skull rejects the optimist's argument, common sense

Against the inner life and transubstantiation joined to shred our
Peace about us, now you see what it's like, as once I was a little girl
With no ambition but seduction until I chanced to overhear
The future, one language fitting into the next, class the common
Element, in which all futile desires quiet away in similar forms
Of loneliness and frustration, in what pursuit? Nightingales singing,
Lightless songs, Phoebus lost in the common swallow of the two
Star-crossed and helpless strangers, in a well-tempered childhood
Grave of ideas, this all took place, long before the economics of our
Interwoven failures came out into the open and I found a four-leaf
Clover, evidence enough to bring the resource question up again, well-
Fed, miserable bookishness amidst a pantheon of glorious athletes,
My hands are shivering, I miss the writing, I know what it has and has
Not given me, here where drawn-out lives grow longer in false desires
Disturbing envy and multifarious revelations of bright recycled hope.

On This Side Nothing

The objects have gone quiet. Even old
Mister Unicorn has run out of words,
despite his painted red lips. Things inured
to emptiness continue with their cold
busyness. And thus the flurry of cash
around the center silence still appears
charitable tinsel, bright with the solace
of distress, the joy of being in arrears
so much more joyful than other joys. Songs
unlike a virus have grown in this season
of record rare, they sound an echo long
in repose and leave conflicted reason
to its bafflement. Things couldn't be worse,
or could, we could resist, or complacent
argue against resistance, neither course
puts change at risk. Though we lay adjacent
the cold garden wall and exquisitely sigh
it will come, freed perhaps of our compelling
but nevertheless compelled. It's well-nigh
Christmas, snow covers the ground and is falling,
the thirsty birds have re-opened our hands:
though weary of ritual tending we deck
the house yet again, reenact the ends
of long antiquated customs, rectify
the aggressive apathy that binds us
to our friends. To what design? What lie lies
hidden in an ornament, in a truss
of tissue snug in a box? An old idea
forced into perverted service of the new