

a handful of poems  
by Leigh Melander, Ph.D.

J J J J

Some Short Thoughts on Thinking

I.

Yesterday has a queer sound  
I thought I was thinking  
But it was only the alarm clock  
You can partner yourself  
On either side of the mirror  
I think it's bedtime

II.

Words spin off my brain  
Like multicolored marbles  
Ricocheting off one another  
To skitter across the floor  
And crouch underneath the cupboards

III.

I am lost  
inside my house  
outside myself  
nowhere in between  
lost  
in the bottom of my feet  
carving words with my toes  
in the sand and stars  
and lint balls on the floor  
epic stories of  
small accomplishments  
and momentary truths

IV.

today is about shapes  
the shape of the world  
the shape of the nation  
the shape of my finances  
the shape of a melon,  
cool on the inside  
but not quite ripe  
tasting a little of the earth  
a little of cardboard  
and me

## Laureate

I heard a man speak tonight  
laurel words unfurling from his lips like  
great white sails of ships  
casting past the tide  
We ride out through the heat  
and hear of Odysseus and his  
journeys away from himself and  
back home again  
where his solace waits nightly  
alone in her bed  
unsinging his death shroud

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## Midlife

Varicose veins struck  
Before maturity  
Greatness died  
In the leaves of August

Mice plan  
But the critics are dancing  
So if you feel nothing  
Dream corners are silent

Dark pirates aside  
Fear scrapes my gut  
Minute Monday  
Is waiting for me

## I Reinvent Myself

I reinvent myself  
thin like silk  
transparent  
reaching forward always  
with a smile like raindrops  
this is morning  
I hadn't thought I'd see it again  
I am reaching past nothing  
words float past me  
I know only their smell  
today I am indigo  
and sound like the catbird singing

♪ ♪ ♪ ♪

## Trimming the Tree

Dusk's circus ends  
And Gaston's rêve revs  
In silent lavender  
Between pianissimo finger strokes  
And the breath of candles

••••

A beautiful, dangerous innocent  
With suckled juice of grapes  
Running down his wrists  
Gulps starlight and the smell of firs  
Drinking himself in

And I wonder  
Did he see stars shining through  
sighing pine boughs  
And hear the egg of his death in  
sparkling sentimentality?

Or did he journey  
With a vast roaring of ancient trees  
Swirling towards an instant of  
Crystallized crucifixion  
Transfixed by his own horrible beauty?

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## Sundance

You left me sitting there just like  
the crumpled dollar bill that you  
left on the counter as a  
tip for the waitress with the  
arch support sneakers  
And you walked through the door that was  
covered with children's fingerprints after  
their breakfast in the diner  
on the way to  
Sundance Wyoming  
(Ain't no sun dancing in my heart, darlin')

And I watched you through the  
wall-sized window as you  
folded yourself behind the  
suede-covered steering wheel of our  
puce-colored pontiac with the  
map on the backseat of all these  
United States with the highways all  
lighted up like the pathway to Jerusalem  
on a pilgrimage from Williamsport  
all the way to  
Sundance Wyoming  
(Ain't even rain dancing in my heart, darlin')

And then I looked down at my  
cowboy boots which were the color of the  
tiny flakes in the formica counter top and  
for the first time started to wonder if  
maybe this all wasn't remotely impossible --  
this travelling all across the country in  
love with the same man and  
wearing the same pair of cowboy boots  
all the way to  
Sundance Wyoming  
(Can't dance at all cause my feet hurt, darlin')

It had made so much sense in the  
dark of an eastern January--the  
intensity of our intentions to see the  
sun rise in the place that it dances and  
discover in that crystal blue sky the  
depth of our chances of loving one  
another for more than one winter -- I just can't figure  
why it's not so clear now

And I heard over and over in my mind the  
just discussions, no, not fights, we'd had on the way as  
the day stretched out in front of me like the  
straight flat red clay roads in  
front of the diner where the  
pontiac had disappeared with you and  
the map inside of it as you headed off  
alone into the sunset and into the sundance all  
by yourself with no music for your soundtrack and  
no guest appearances by John Wayne or  
anybody else  
all the way to  
Sundance Wyoming  
(Dancing alone ain't really dancing, darlin')

Somehow it all had unravelled and  
lost its shimmering magic and  
become just a dusty road trip filled with  
radio static and not too much more -- I  
saw this for certain as the shadows of  
the cactus outside grew tall as  
Geronimo as the sun, too, lost  
interest and wandered off into the  
distance and the moon started to rise  
and for the first time I started to realize that  
maybe this was all possible and maybe the  
magic could shimmer again if  
only the moon shone  
sometimes in  
Sundance Wyoming  
(I'm saving the next dance for you.)

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## Phlogiston (before Penance and Perfection):

An Infernal Attempt at A Comedy Snippet with a Smattering of the Divine

### Canto I

One day like those that we have trekked before  
I lose myself to wander lonely and alone  
In no dark wood, alive with Pan and promise

But down dim chasms of deep concreted towers  
Gray-trussed, long-still, and with no breath to hold  
Back garish admonitions to accept

The platitudes of common stale desires:  
I want, I wear, I will, I would, I wait  
And take the pledge of acquisition as a truth

No wonder here, no awe, and no delight  
Just some hollow revolution of appetite  
Unfilled and unfulfilling, an empty snack of death

No tracks amongst these tracks, no passage on these roads  
No visions past this simple stream of fate  
Just that what I 'should' no matter love, nor even hate

Fearful now, I seek to find an edge  
Of such dark ruins with no center and no end  
I run down narrow, gory alleys, searching for a door

But only find dead endings, closed and trite  
The random buzz of busyness eludes  
A music of the spheres or any other shape

Hard-blown, with strong still wind effaced  
I traverse towards a wider avenue  
In hope to find a quiet cough of breath

A wider lens and wider thought I seek  
And there I glimpse a flash of verdant glades  
Just beyond my eyelids, pure and out of reach

I turn to run to scents cerulean and green  
But see before me, quick and lean and sharp  
Three screens, all-seeing, flashing from the dark.

Blocking sun with artificial prayers  
Their faces lit with infinite dark grace  
These monitors compel my courtesy

To stand and hold their message in my heart  
Know -all, owed-all, they counsel me past thought  
The first with colors bright and blithely wrought.

‘We sing of gleaming smiles and jingling wealth  
Of troubles gone and challenges effaced  
By simple loot with consciousness erased.’

Comforted, I circle towards the next  
Now sure that its deep wisdom will enhance  
Seduction I will be still more entranced.

The second, though its colors are still sharp  
Holds me with a piercing, cruel embrace,  
A kiss of death disposing on my cheek.

‘What right have other wretcheds to compare  
Their wants and needs with our superb desires?  
We’ll smash them, crush them, flick them from the earth.’

Blood surges through my courage at the rights  
Of might and glory, wheeling through the night.  
The third will surely chant infinite joy.

But when I whirl to sip the visions sweet  
Of this last teacher’s glistening insight  
Just ranks of numbers march across its face.

‘Intellect-lost and market-tossed  
We chant ‘to have and hold’ as sacred lore  
Consumed by that we had consumed before.’

These canny visionaries then increase  
Their dizzying distortions of the truth  
Bombarded, I am thrust into the dark

Ruins further and the sunlight seems to die  
My ears are cracked with my own cries of dread  
My heart is filled with sullen loss of hope

Then through my blindness a figure, almost clear  
With edges blurred and colors bleached away:  
Like clarity of thought long-tucked from light of day

'If man or hologram,' I cry, 'help me!  
Don't leave me in this hopeless, howling place  
Where crumbled concrete replaced all patterned trace

Of joy or breath or likeness of a human life.'  
The shadow smiles, and asks me why I stay.  
Amazed, I ask who this could be, a man

Who apprehends an infinite free choice  
Of divine silence in this deafening city  
And simply wonders why I stand and wait.

'I wrote a verse,' said he, 'of journeys done,  
Of centers and fulfillment past the sun.  
Past mortal griefs uncoiled to the One.'

He watches me, undaunted, and I know  
He was the pilgrim, traveled from a wood  
With Virgil at his side, and found a truth

'I'll go with you, back inward towards your death  
For to reach the outward, first you look within.  
I will go with you as far as to the one,

But further to the crystal myriad  
Of all the visions making up the sole  
I can not take you, another will go on.'

The monitors around us raise their shrieks  
I stop in fear; he hardly turns around  
'Leave them to the child who comes behind

Remote, unfettered, she will disconnect  
Their discord from your eyes and ears and heart  
Forget them, for we are turning in.'

Grateful, humbled, awed, I stumble down  
The terror of the streets I'd just run from.  
Towards the heart of the abyss, that was mine own.

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