

I. Mosaics

I woke up this morning to a silent house. Agim left for Japan just as the sun was rising. It's late February, a grey and teasing rain has fallen upon Prishtina. Even my soul is wet. The marrow of my bones is damp. Like the wood frames of an old house, I creak as I move. The sun doesn't penetrate in loose fragments. I go through my usual morning routine. In a haze, I place a pot of water on the stove. Catch a glimpse of myself in hair rollers in the mirror. Wash the sleep from my eyes. The grey has infiltrated my home as well. I can't shake the melancholy in my stomach and chest.

Agim has come to understand this about me. I have come to know his strength, in turn. Very little shakes him. I, on the other hand, find the emptiness I keep at bay sometimes wins out. As a younger woman it used to disturb me. Now I acknowledge it like an old friend come to visit. In fact, I find a strange comfort in its enduring presence, as if the cycles of life go on uninterrupted, as evidence that I live.

I go to the cleaners next. The stains haven't come out of my overcoat. They promise to repeat the process. Crows with their thin beaks and shrill cries gather around heaps of garbage. I've come to be comforted by this picture too. I find myself building a home amidst the rubbles and ripples of life.

Perhaps the best way to describe this series is as a mosaic of writings. With the placement of each tile, a more complete portrait emerges—one that can only be seen by shifting between looking closely and standing back. Meaning reveals itself in the movement. The meaning of contingency
and chaos
and the poetry therein.

In the mists of a dense winter storm
I see my future stretch out before me
Unfurling its lunar wings

There is a calm in the storm's chaos I hope to someday command

Even the rush of moving cars is softened as if behind a wall of cotton
Operating in a world just beyond

Destiny and fate can both carry things of beauty
And things of tragedy
So, what is the true difference between the two
And why has it always mattered so much?

A not-so-distant shadow of a girl makes her way suddenly from the windowpane into the
darkness of the house behind her
The winter wind rings hollow in my ears
There is no sharp buzzing today

Only the low howl of a wind that
Sweeps the world
Only to be interrupted by a distant car horn

It alternates now between snow and rain

Layer

Upon freezing layer

II. Spaces

Today on the plane I wept. Unapologetic, convulsing tears. Amidst the passengers in fitful sleep, in dull lighting,

I wept.

I wept for dreams that don't come true. I wept for my grandmother (then in surgery).
But mostly for the dreams that won't come true.

I wept for generations of promising women cut at the stem. I wept for those that never had a chance to fail at their dreams and I wept
for those of us that have.

My grandmother lay on an operating table, my mother in her bed on the other side of the world, as I laid amongst others attempting rest
in the sky
between the two.

I write this now on a layover in Zurich. The snow has been falling quietly and diligently
and efficiently —

like a movie set.

The idea of rest keeps coming to mind in this sterile “non-place”¹, not meant for rest at all
— meant only for transience.

I think about the haunting notion of how this whole world is becoming an increasingly
transient space.

I think that this is perhaps truly

why I wept.

¹ Marc Augé, *Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity* (London: Verso, 1995).

Snowflakes fall on top of each other cusped perfectly into one another's hands.

Surely there is a space between them

But what is in that space?

That space between the snowflakes?

Within that space I could clap my hands and hear nothing

I could call out and not be heard

In that space

Fitted between snowflakes

I will be pure and happy because

I will be both within the world and also utterly,

Entirely,

Outside of it.

III. Mother

Sometimes I tell my mother I miss her

Sometimes she doesn't respond

I have now come to understand it is not that she doesn't feel it too

She feels it too deeply

And is paralyzed, frozen

By the depth of emotion

By the confrontation of reality

By the dynamism of a life

That requires us to be far from the ones we love in some form or another

When I think of her

She is too grand to be held in my thoughts in any singular

Or all-encompassing way

She cannot be distilled

Her figure looms too large

Perhaps one day I will write a work entirely about her

Perhaps that day will never come

Because words are Sisyphean

Perhaps I must be satisfied with the fact

That we are both extensions of one another
and simultaneously separate entities
and this will never be reconciled
and it never should
as the beauty of our bond lies
in just that very dissonance

and finding a way to speak on it
is the stuff of life

IV. Sun

They say the harshest sunlight
Are the rays just as the sun sets

Diell me dhëmbë — “A biting sun”

It burns me as I write this
It hits my aching skin
And I am acutely aware

Of its divinity.

AGIMI (*m.*) from the proto-Albanian “ag”, compare to the Ancient Greek “augě” meaning daylight or

Splendor

I am thinking also of the
Unassuming and awesome tenderness
Of the force
That is
to be held
By another.

See also: dawn, daybreak, twilight, semi-darkness, fog, shine, pupils
...And all its fragmentary and silvery mechanisms,

like a crystal cast up in the sunlight

V. Hiraeth

This morning, at about 4:30, I awoke with the stillness of the world. A quiet bursting forth of light — a birth of silence. I sit on my balcony in Prishtina. One of the many places I consider home. Or rather, that “home” has come to mean a vague pang of longing and nostalgia cast upon various landscapes that have informed me.

Flying into the small bowl held by rugged mountains I am always overwhelmed with emotion unlike that which I experience flying into New York or even Chicago.

Not a rush of energy
But the softness

Of a private prayer.

I must remind myself that I have made the long journey home not for others but for myself. An effort to conquer myself by returning to the place that, although geographically small, looms large in the ghostly center of my being. Unknown but ever present, written into the strands of DNA that course through me, that make up my very physiognomy — the way I hold my head, the way I take my shallow breaths, the way I exude that which is uniquely my own.

I am not sure what I hope to find besides that which I can only describe as

Understanding.

Written on My Wedding Day

I awoke this morning with a feeling in the pit of my stomach
Like a quiet cataclysm that lies on the horizon
An irreconcilable dissonance
The definition of which is:
A lack of harmony

Will anything ever again be entirely my own?

I am being swept up in the unstoppable current
That took my foremothers
And now
I find myself in a waking discord
One foot in the future promise I embody
And one
In a sticky past
With roots deep in the earth and vines crawling along my body
Worms and photosynthesis and dirt

And processes older
Than my singular will

Who and what am I but a small network of stars
Hurling myself against a vast fabric of the universe

And yet, a small comfort
In knowing that although they may worry for me
My ancestors also delight in the sheer possibility of my positionality and its privileges

Blueprints inscribed into the very sinew
Woven into the very fabric
of my body
My right hip that is always sore
The tension headaches that surface despite my diligence
Is also the memory of a strength that propels my body forward
That fights through pain
That insists on my singular presence
That insists on my marriage

That finds everlasting joy in my partnership

VI. B.C.E.

I think on my time in New York City. Conceptions of memory, but perhaps not memory itself. Flashes of linearity and happenings, events that come together in an ad hoc narrative arc.

“Do you remember when we...”

I smile vaguely. I remember the affect, I remember the haziness and its stupor, I remember a vulnerable youth. I remember an air.

“At least we made memories...”

Did I, in fact?

I was far too dissociated, far too concerned either with a past that haunted me or a future too vast for comfort.

I made transient friends, found myself in a dingy (what I told myself would be a temporary) apartment, worked jobs I hated. All just “until I got where I needed to go”.

Suddenly, these elements came to define my life.

I listen to others discuss their 20s with a twinkle in their eye, with a romantic gleam. For me NYC is not a series of moments but, rather, a singular strewn out moment that in anticipation of another life came to define a decade.

I suppose I don’t remember anything. New York flashes dimly in the film reels of my mind. Everything collapsed into itself like a dying star.

The other night I returned to my old home in Brooklyn.
The Bed-Stuy block interrupted abruptly by a shoreline.
It was submerged in water
I came to understand that somehow the Adriatic had spilled over space and time

To drown it.

VII. Moon

Tonight is the last full moon of my stay in Kosovë. Tonight, I am thinking about the possibility of oneness. The coming together of two unique beings into a third and integrated whole. Can I ever give myself fully to another?

I am not speaking here of fidelity — the shallowest minded can do that with the right motivation. I am speaking here of exposing the small morsel within me that feels distant even to myself. The shadowy elements of my being that know no continuity aside from its consistently ambiguous nature.

Perhaps I adore these elements as they are and are not extensions of myself, and they exist, as I do, of their own volition. Elements of the freedom to be ever present and undefined.

How, then, can I truly become one with another?

Sometimes he asks me about this shadow that colors me, a distant glance, an inhale, the cock of an eyebrow. It betrays even me, its host. Letting its presence be known, if even momentarily, to those who want to truly know me.

I am coming to discover that knowing and loving someone is not finite. Nor are they places of arrival.

To know and to love is to know and love, significantly, the depths that elude us.

VIII. Dreams

I had a dream I was swimming in a moody and dark Lake Michigan

with my laundry
of all things

My black socks floating above the soapy water like beached whales
Bloated and comically large in my dream-mind's eye

I would dip my head under the water
But the suds would burn my eyes
I feared the vast expanse of the unknown
What lay beneath the tufts of bubbles
What lay beyond the darkness
What remained shrouded in mystery and stung my eyes

The dissonance between that which could not be known
and the intimacy of my own clothing
strewn about in the storm
Strangely gave me a sense of calm resolve

I made my way to the rusted ladder nearest me
I pulled my body, made heavier by the wet clothing that hung off me like molten skin, out of the lake
I sat next to the swirling imminence
I was surprisingly

Not cold

There was a Balkan market in the neighborhood behind my grade school
It was a weekly ritual that we would stop there for snacks on the way to my voice lessons
While singing, my siblings would be practicing scales in their piano lessons
My mother in the waiting room in her scrubs
(Did she read magazines?)

We would all pile into a little red car that was sold to us by a distant family member
The car would break down often
The two front seats would have to be latched down for access to the back
In this little red car, we would spend hours driving to music school and soccer matches and theatre premieres and emergency rooms and science fairs and Christmas tree lots and the Balkan market

That time I recall with a rosy filter
My brother's return
The smell of wooden lockers at Sacred Heart
The feel of uniformed wool against my thigh
Then high school
The rush of sheer promise for the future

The ice-cold reset feel of Lake Michigan on a dizzying August day, waves cutting into the horizon

Literature and Botero and opera

And the vastness of the human spirit and the human condition

Everything new

The world bursting forth before me

In my dream it was night

Perhaps a holiday

There was no one out on a usually busy Devon Street

The Balkan Market, dark

I couldn't find my family

(I was just with them)

I couldn't find the little red car

I wake up to a text from Agim sent at 7:30 am

He lays beside me, fast asleep

I figure it was an error

The message reads:

"I found"

It has been weeks now that I am having dreams

Tied to themes of family and setting roots and the anxieties of belonging

When I sip my coffee in the morning

I can feel the clicking of my jaw

Two nights prior I had two children, a young girl and a baby boy

As the boy clung to my arms

Helpless and reaching

I was taken aback by my daughter's brilliant eyes

Self-assured and determined

She disappeared

Taken from me

Or perhaps even in the dreamscape

I was contending with reality,

Did she ever exist?

As I settle in after a long day of jaw cracking
My husband says, "Oh yes, I texted you so I wouldn't forget..."
"Last night I dreamt that I found our daughter..."
"I took a boat over clear blue waters..."

"I found her on the other side."

IX. The House

We changed homes often when I was a child. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of the feelings that inhabited them. As I grew, so did my ability to understand the stale energy of my father's reign.

One home in particular was haunted
Or perhaps, there, for the first time, I was conceptualizing fear
Old enough to perceive my father's abuse yet too young to understand that every family does
not, in fact, function that way

And thus my anxieties were projected onto a shadowy figure
A tall man with a black top hat
Lurking in doorways and the fringes of my eyeline

My parents' bedroom looked out onto a balcony that ran along the back of the house
Right beneath their window,
On the balcony's handrail,
On the remote end
Sat a plant pot set upside down
The previous owners must have left

It was waiting for us when we moved in

One spring day I decided to lift the pot to see what lay underneath

In a loud hiss that I will never forget
That still cascades in my mind to this day
A wall of
earwigs
poured out toward me

I had uncovered a demonic colony

For the remainder of our short stay in the house
Earwigs tortured us day in and out
Quietly making their way up our bodies
Swatting them away
Seeing them on each other's cheeks
Meanwhile
The backdrop:

An idyllic American suburbia

That same spring my cousin was catching frogs in our garden
Smashing all of them into one large jar
Filled to the brim
He shut the lid to play with them the next day
They of course asphyxiated and died
The lot of them
All 30 or so

In that same house my baby brother fell down a set of cement stairs
My mother screamed out into the skies as she held him
Making crazed laps around the house

At Christmas my parents bought me a porcelain doll
The kind bought at specialty stores with plaid and frills and curls and the smell of powder and
the soft rush of two porcelain hands
Being rubbed together

On that same day her face caved in

There was a magic to the agony of brevity and casual violence and imminent death and the
symphony of destruction

I don't know if in that house something of my childhood
Was destroyed

Or enhanced

X. Arbëreshtë

The sun set on a group of people making dolls in a field
In Calabria

The sky burst forth with color
but not the usual bright palette
Today, behind the hills
Soft hues emerged
Like a watercolor painting

There was no breeze
Yet the grass still hummed somehow
A soft lullaby
Sung by Mother Earth
Punctuated by different dialects of Albanian

The sweet aroma of the flowers
Surrounded us and stuck to our fingers as we worked them into our dolls

A brief moment in the lives
Of people who are only on Earth

For a brief moment

That is, a moment within a moment

And yet
This ritual
1,000 years old
And the bond of brotherhood
Even older
Allowed us to tap into the infinity
The bounty
Of the human spirit

Our guide in Calabria
Mentions off-hand
That big cities have an innate verticality
And that smaller communities
In contrast
Are both horizontal
And cyclical
Like a spiral

I am struck by the profundity of this comment.

Traditional Arbëreshë dance is done
By interlocking hands and moving, as a group,

Towards and away from a center

Like a breath

Like a pulse

Then I think about spirals

A central point fixed on what can be imagined as an infinite line

Expanding on what can be imagined

As an infinite curve and rotation

I aspire

to these infinities.