

salt  
is  
for  
curing

*poems*

sonya  
vatomsky

“No one has ever written or painted, sculpted, modeled, built,  
invented, except to get out of Hell.”

— A Artaud

“And life can be as important as death  
But so mediocre when there’s no air, no light and no hope  
Prejudice burns brighter when it’s all we have to burn  
The world lances youth’s lamb-like winter, winter”

— R Edwards

*Aperitif*

## Bathymetry

When I was young a teacher told me all  
artists dream about tidal waves  
(James Joyce, for example)  
so when the horizon came down blue  
and heavy I wasn't exactly unprepared.  
I also know scientists hate that term:  
*tidal wave*.  
"It's nothing to do with the tide,"  
though when you see me  
it's a moonpull  
as much as it is anything.  
Think about it — I mean, ever notice  
they call it *lunacy*  
like the moon's got her own  
special kind of hysteria  
just because sometimes gravity doesn't work  
quite the way they like?  
Men are always policing my mouth like that:  
"*You can't bone me,*" for example.  
Like I'm a butterfly  
that won't stay in its goddamned net.  
It's a good reason to never trust entomologists  
with their pins and their bell jars,  
looking at your wings thinking *catch*,  
thinking *mount*, separating the art  
from the artist  
with their little knives,  
so they can go back to enjoying  
their molesters and rapists in peace

while I wane and wax  
into something unignorable:  
I've got the kind of light  
you name galaxies after.  
Andromeda, for example,  
which means "ruler of men"  
so, of course,  
they stripped her naked and chained her  
to a rock.  
As the tide crawls in on its wet hands  
I pinch my nose,  
which hurts, with all the metal in it,  
and that's a funny way for the universe to end,  
or begin, as it will.

*First Course*

## **Threnody in three courses**

The guests are clockwise around the table:  
mother, father, all three brothers, a witch, her lover,  
multiple fat housecats and then me, arriving late.  
Black wool soaked to the bone and hair slick against  
my forehead like lines in sand from the receding tide.  
Whenever we toast a death I raise my glass expectantly;  
the housecats have better manners, and they know how  
to be loved like I don't. It's better when the sun sinks down,  
smoke snaking through my room like a priest's incense as  
I tend to plants, to fingernails, keeping everything constrained  
in a corset laced by ritual and pulled taut with the gravity  
of tradition, moving me soft across the board like a footless  
ghost. Forward, forward, wait. I could never play chess;  
I can only defend. Fortify walls and spill salt on the perimeter.  
Expect the worst and then what? It knocks three times or  
creeps in through the window like a secret lover, lips to your  
brow. Roll the demon over and sit on his chest till the breath  
sputters out — a priest's incense finding God in the  
ceiling cracks. The moon is a dish of cream in the ink-black  
sky I dye my clothes with and the guests sit clockwise around  
the table. When I toast this death I clink my glass and no  
admonishment comes.  
I arrived late. You will not arrive at all.

## Lappish Hag's Love Potion

Soak  
in  
old  
bathwater  
and  
sluice  
away  
skin  
until  
ribs  
open  
up  
and  
the  
heart  
is  
expelled  
like  
an  
oyster  
pearl.

## **Redirected from Lappish Hag's Love Potion**

SALT, 3 polished silver tablespoons for each 3  
(you can substitute TEARS)  
liters of water. 1 kilogram CUCUMIS SATIVUS, 9  
(you can substitute TEARS)  
cloves GARLIC. Root and leaves, HORSERADISH.  
(you can substitute TEARS)  
3 fresh stalks, ANETHUM GRAVEOLENS. Lastly,  
(you can substitute TEARS)  
a cautious handful of BLACK PEPPER.  
(you can substitute TEARS)

## Rhotic Asphyxiation

The safest place to bury a body  
is in another body,  
is in your own body. Is your own dead body  
inside the one you present to the world, the one that still talks  
and walks  
across Pangea because that is how old it is,  
that is how old faking is. You were born fake as your body  
came out another fake body; you drank amniotic fluid shots  
in the belly of the body your mother swallowed when the  
world told her so  
and you breathed true body breath then  
and only then. A Russian girl can't write a book without  
nesting dolls;  
burying ourselves in ourselves is in our blood, is in our  
mother's blood.  
We birth, we bury, we swallow tongues down the body  
buried inside the body. Tongue is a delicacy  
you can serve at a funeral. The safest place to bury a body  
is at a funeral.

## Casaubon prepares a simple dinner

“The particular empirical event doesn’t matter,” she said. “It’s an ideal principle, which can be verified only under ideal conditions. Which means never. But it’s still true.”

— Foucault’s Pendulum

If:

you wake with bugbites on neck, face red of sun and drink,  
wrist and left hand aching from previous night’s maddened  
violin screeching,  
eyes beady with desire

Then:

walk for hours and hours through fields and hills and little  
towns until the purple sky boils and green turns to gold turns  
to black, pick at the blotch on your index finger,  
think of little dialogues,  
the cottage,  
the butter and mortar and pestle and single cow,  
the oil-smooth pond where I’ll catch your dinner,  
bring back home the creature to eat fried, scales and all,  
roll the eyeballs around on tongues,  
little de-winged flies littering the wooden table as neither you  
nor I  
are good housekeepers.

Drink till we have to hold our faces up.

Feel the heat about our ears.

Bury ourselves in the other’s chest, hot handfuls of earth down  
each time we close down eyelids, down each time we drink  
down the glass.

And:

I love you. I have always loved you. I will always love you.  
One day in a forest where you lent me that grey sweater,  
one evening in the hills with fashionable sofas and a gold ring,  
one night in a car and  
who can hope that in two thousand years someone will be  
decoding this  
with dials, with arithmetic — so  
that I'll be spared saying, out of disinterest in cruelty,  
that I'm addressing this to.....

And:

that if I've got no reality,  
at least I've an ideal.  
Which means never.  
But it's still true.

## Coq au vin

I make a thick paste from the bones  
of a phoenix, half a bruised yellow onion. Hold my  
head over the steam in my nostrils, feet aching  
I'm opening my skin for you, folding it down and around  
Rolling out my skin for you, wrapping it like crust to  
warm your bones as you rise to breathe my breath  
A phoenix's bones; I'm spreading skin thin on a slab and  
you yawn. Cooking — it takes too long. A woman —  
she takes too long. I've been accused of loving before so  
I'm undoing my skin for you, pressing the edges  
down around hard white stalks. You hissing like a teapot  
through American teeth, grabbing from behind, drinking  
my wine and laughing too loudly, spilling, your very  
breath takes up space I need for mine. I stir, I knead, I salt  
I peel my skin off like lettuce leaves, press them wet against  
your mouth to stop the ocean; let me talk, let me whisper  
This is so you never rise  
This is so you never rise  
This is so you never rise