

vii	<i>Acknowledgements</i>
1	Nothing
2	Plenitude
4	Elba
5	On Being Asked Who the You Is in My Poems
7	Questions for Godzilla
9	The Invisible Man Looks into a Mirror
11	Beyond Repair
12	Minus
14	History
15	Psalm in Rain
17	Romance
19	Negation
21	At Last
23	The Naked
25	Daydreaming of Ghosts
27	The God of Neglect, Overheard
29	From the Black Lagoon
31	How It Won't Be
32	Seduction with Entropy
34	Veneration
35	Apologia
37	In Praise of the Defective
39	Exit Interview

- 41 Resignation
- 42 The Cartoonist in Hell
- 44 My Philosophy of Other Lives
- 45 Donald Duck's Lament
- 47 Popular Romance
- 49 These Arms of Mine
- 51 Such as Myself
- 53 Poem for the National Hobo Association
Poetry Contest
- 55 Notes for My Body Double
- 57 Questions for Silence
- 59 For a Woman's Back
- 61 Ode
- 63 Perfume
- 64 Erasure
- 66 Poem in Which I Seek Consolation
in the Etymology of a Word
- 67 Hunger
- 69 The Numbers Are Not In
- 71 Love Poem
- 73 Water
- 74 Ptolemaic Sunset
- 75 Lullaby
- 77 Practice

Nothing

Between Buck Owens and Vivaldi what's left
to listen to but the stars, so I do, dialing
the radio down to indeterminate static,
what I always thought was absence, an aria
of sizzling nothingness. Instead
it's the Milky Way radiating arrhythmia
all the way back. It's gossip
of the vacuum. That nothing has never been
truly nothing is why I believe,
even still, in love. Beside two rivers
I have lived nearly all my life
and these beneath one sky
muttering its endless alphabet of sine waves.
Jupiter with its flock of moons
and the stone from which we hope
to squeeze one drop of water,
red Mars pulsing in the blank field of night—
I've wanted to leave Earth
behind, gravity's orphan at last,
but not Earth with its two good seasons and two bad
and not its angel-winged clams
luminous in the mud bed of a river
so distant from me
I can't remember where
that water is, except that I've dreamed it,
except that in it I sank
all the way down.

That boy in the snowy late light
midnight tv gives the skin, blue then
dark then blue, is me. With my mind
shaped like a finger, I point
him out. This is before he will point
a borrowed bike downhill
and touch me in return. This, too, is before
rushing home in rain, through
woods, stopping in a clearing of clouds
and canopy to note moon
like milk on my skin, in the water white
and pebbled, for the first time
in my life. I called it home, the apartment
we would love in after class
and there she waited while I drowned
in my clothes, in that light
bouncing earthward from the sun a world
away. This is before I fell.
This is before I swallowed back
a new species of emotion
I'd never known to live within
my chest, before I said
not a word to her that suggested I might
go away and go unmissed.
This is before I fled. This is before
I hung in the elevator's throat
and waited for the world
to catch back up, for the world to spit back
lost time. This is before

I lost a friend to the vacuum of his blood,
the blown veins leading
back to his heart. This is before
I loved three times. This is before
I feared all day to lose
the last, my heart pulsing like a lead cloud.
This is before. Curled
and in a clot, before long he'll sleep.
He'll rehearse another
life. All night long I wait and I watch.
One by one I write down
what he dreams.

When she tells me her name I'm thinking
of Napoleon's exile there. Of his hand
in paintings, oddly tucked away,
and the vague memory that it meant
something, once. I'm thinking
then of Bugs Bunny aping Bonaparte
and how as a child I laughed
but did not know the thousands dead
in his name. I'm thinking
not at all what she would like
kneeling there in the aisle of this plane
when she asks if I was born
this way, and who in Chicago takes care
of me, a wife, a girlfriend—
she knows one or the other is in my life.
When I tell her which two
white rings of bone in my neck
are fused, wired, made one,
I can see her ardor marry grief
and I want to save her
from my life. I tell her
that some now think Napoleon died
of a hormonal disease
slowly making of him a woman,
his body white, smooth, hairless,
with breasts a physician thought beautiful,
and though she smiles
I can't tell which story she no longer
wants to know.

On Being Asked Who the You Is in My Poems

You are always eighteen or married
or both, carrying inside you
a surgeon or a singer growing
away from you like a little cloud,
and you have just escaped
from the leprosarium hidden
beyond the horizon's lead smudge,
slinking through damp kudzu
to rap at my window
in the slowly sprawling darkness,
in the sodden green glow
of these two nights, mine
and yours. Or you've retired
from a secret life,
the oath sworn upon your bleeding thumb
now broken. The petal,
a curled pink that fell
and boiled in the black mirror of my coffee,
for a moment today was you
just as you were the bone of a thin girl's hip
swimming beneath her
skin like a fish.
Limbless girl
bowling via surrogate
while a jukebox ate through change,
your smile
once broke the earth open like a bone
ribboned with silk red
marrow. In the smoke rank air

Copyrighted Material

all the world did

was turn and turning

away I began to keep your secrets like my own.

Notes for My Body Double

By Paul Guest

University of Nebraska Press

Questions for Godzilla

What of the atom's split heart we made
for you and the godly flash-bang wrath,
the anguished song, the clawed gait,
the zipper by which one of us slips into
and puts you on, your death we dangle
like a carrot, your stunted son mewling
always, your ragged arch foes,
your bed in rock, in magma, in thick sea slime,
our fascination still, our morbid heart,
our scattering like leaves, our blood
that once was horrible, a Technicolor ichor,
what of the glowing spine,
what of the toy stings of stock footage flames,
what of the jets you swatted dead
from the air with unmistakable joy,
you of the plastic-leather, pebbled Pleistocene flesh,
you of the palsied fury, you
of the put-upon by dissemblers and disturbers,
you, what of the life burned
so cheaply into celluloid we are charmed,
what of autumn, what of the earth
we took you from, what of the sky's wounded throb,
the fallow child darkened
in your shadow, what of those thousand fates
cut in coiling ribbons
to the floor, what of the heaven they hoped on
that glowed like your breath,
that sang only before you came,

that fell quiet like a feather,
what of the shouted orders,
the dread retreat, the fall of a world built to scale,
what is pain to you?