

Acts

Failure is possible in many ways.
Aristotle, *Ethics*

PASTORAL

Here opens, mouth
of appetite, throat of

prairie grass A walks
across to get where he's

confident in going:
a building his father

said he'd reach
with discretion and

the proper fellowship. In
a western hamlet lies this simple

structure. Cupboards, inlaid
with sheaves of wheat,

store warm bread.
There's running water,

a cask of red wine near
the door; the hearth

draws two corners,
completes the sentence.

At a table,
fiddler, fabulist,

creditor and B sit with-
out contradiction and eat.

Outside, fixed on
the retaining wall

between private property
and public grazing

a haggard figure starves
himself to death

at a familiar rate:
a little each day.

His eyes hunger.
The end is a gift

of nature C refuses.
He settles, instead,

to mortgage acts,
pay interest

to what weighs him
in his chair. The narrator's

privilege is to see
D as he is and forgo

the humility recognition
demands. E is the dead

pledge the narrator holds.
It is *his* account.

F'S DREAM

A family sleeps in its suburban home. G's in his room cornered by grotesque men and animals from a thirteenth century bestiary, intent on sharing his bonewood and blood.

This shouldn't frighten H. Normally, he'd grip their arms, beat their skulls joyfully with a hammer until they become cracked husks and powdered grain. He can't face these down.

I opens the window, clutches its ledge, swings his legs over the sill and lets go, taking down aluminum trim. He looks up from the ground as the wall's siding falls, exposing the tacked-on tar paper and ribs of plywood underneath. His sins are written there in white.

J sneaks back into the house and creeps up the stairs. Garland, holly, and vine. His mother meets him in the dark. She worries, offers soup. K declines; she recedes into the tangle of roots.

His brother grabs him in the hall. Asks why they found him shivering next to the garage. L doesn't remember. His brother reminds of the homecoming a day earlier. Lysergic. They got drunk as four sailors.
"Oh."

M ducks into his room as the narrator wakes, relieved it was only a dream, and that, already on its way to logic.

He leaves N rearranging furniture there, planning, when dawn breaks, to nail sheets of aluminum into the soft heart of plywood.

When dawn breaks, he will make up the lost time, cover the signs he fell from.

EPISTOLARY EXCERPTS FROM A WOMAN O KNOWS

“Your question, P, is futile.
You are the question asked.
The answer is

the question unfolding you”
Q shifts,

“Look to me for clues and
the self-hatred you practice”
in doubt,

you blame on me.”
naked in bed,

“The responsibility to choose
who to fuck
counts as knowledge”

reading leisurely
before his afternoon nap.
“or else blindness...

Difference is the pole around
which our lives twist” teeth
limb angles/limb small

inscrutable gaps
“in
chancery. Violence and architecture,”

/buckle
“biology and cells, grow
from the same origin.”

(R recalls sexual episodes
as cubism.)
“Why else
would men have nipples too?

The hand drawing itself
still depends
on representation....You
think you
communicate because

you type, understand codes,
lick stamps,

punch 11 digits
and hear my voice
in a line..."

S forgets
who writes.

"relationship with my
mother" Agitated, he
covers his genitals
whistles

"the economy...
outside of confines...Yes,
I'm in a place where"
The narrator quits

"I couldn't begin to tell
you what it's like."

FOUR VERBS FOR T

work

From Indo-European *werg*—to do,
act, seen in the Greek *orgon*, also
organon—tool, instrument, like
organ

U's body: a thing done,
a thing done in doing.

Either

an old curse, or site
where telos and death cross,
heading
in opposite directions.

mind

V buried a tidy sum
in his backyard. Now
times are thin. His yard
is pockmarked. He has
forgotten where he buried
it. He will become poor,
when he stops digging, light
and airy. Birds circle above
his head. He holds his face
in his hands and is forgiven
by the sight.

To care for

W intransitive

verb that takes no object

pick

From a tree, heavy with
fruit, X hangs. Not suicide

but metaphor—a choice made.

He quivers, a breeze struck
string (peculiar music),
until he's had enough sun
and falls

or when the narrator
plucks him for dessert.

O! How the will tastes
so sweet so cold.

free

is defined as if
negation were
the prior condition.

Y leaves the home
he inherited
steps willingly
in time that knows no
word, nor mind of

liberate, liber, lie, i
Z
the narrator
moves without