

the devil made the dinosaur bones

bpb

june 2010

there are two fundamental possibilities
either the devil made the dinosaur bones
or god put them under the earth
in order to trick us



i found a notebook in a pocket the other day
only one page had been written on

it said
why the hell is my short-term memory so shot?

i had forgotten the notebook existed.

bad paintings in the cafes everywhere
bad poems at all the readings
bad sex, good sex you should know better than
bad history and the broken body politic
sometimes it's hard to know

what motions you're going through

busted watches, bookstores, *anodyne*
credit cards and wadded up receipts
street corners, cardboard signs,
internet machinery and paperback novels
concert fliers in the gutter
liquor, drugs, and roadtrip hangovers
nothing gets you high like it used to.



the first few times
the world breaks in on
your understanding of
things and leaves you
astonished

it's easy to come off
like a convert – like
life itself is some
new gospel, some extra-
ordinary secret

hidden like the kingdom
of god is hidden, under
rocks and firewood, in
the communion of some
newly found

elect. but this cheap
ecstasy seems to grow
hollower with time, or
astonishment itself less
astonishing

because i'm not sure
now, what i used to
carry on about when
i was so certain of my
certainty

all i remember is that
i moved out of my parents'
house and met some girls,
read some books and
got drunk a lot on rainy nights.



history teaches less
than experience,
and it's little enough
of experience
that becomes history

memory balances between
gratitude and regret
between building up
and burning down

but it's not always clear
which is which

if it's hard to know
what i should do now
it isn't much easier
to see
what i should have done then



there's a lot to lose
in a given life
and there are no
objective guarantees
beyond the accumulation
of fact – no scales wait
to weigh that dirty
heart of yours, there's no
prize for the portion
you keep clean.
everybody knows this is
nowhere, everyone's
a busted record.
it's all metatheoretics,
all worn out elaborations
and brokedown ontologies,
the phylogeny recapitulating
failure modes
while ink dries on the page,
the pages turn brittle,
and you wait for some kind of payoff
with the engine running hot
and the framerate dropping
like a rock.



i read a book once
about the human species
all but vanishing from
the face of the earth
and the idea has not
left me ever since, to
the extent that i have
been reading that same
book over and over
whenever i discover
that someone has written
it again, and daily
write it over & anew
in my own mind.



empty doorframes, broken windows
a silent world, the night without bulbs or filaments
broken glass and invasive species
thistles through concrete
blasted trees and depleted wells
the dustbowl ghosts are bidding substance
the apocalypse is always just around the bend
the apocalyptic current has
been running for millennia
the irrigation is always waiting to sputter out
there are cracks in all the molds
the door hangs half off its hinges
the chisel turned to rust before you were born,
and the inscriptions are so worn now you
can barely make out the fact of an alphabet
or the idea of a language
no one who hears the rhyme scheme
can keep a straight face anyway
the flying cars are worth less as scrap than
the steam engines and stock tanks one layer down
there's ratshit and plastic gravel in the rocket motors
the glow screens are leaching heavy metals
out into the salmon runs and tidal flats
a dream of ruin and a fear of decay
chase each other around your busy mind
the plains alive again with herds and flocks,
children starving in the wreckage
of the gleaming city.

burnt the broccoli
tomatoes weren't quite ripe
but hell, it could be worse
it could be worse to the extent
that it's something like impossible
to list all the potential mechanisms
and avenues by which it could be worse
any effort would probably turn into some
kind of sermon on the hazards and occasions
of prosperity and god knows i've spent enough
time cheerlessly berating myself for the
certain hypocrisy of living in a town
this full of distracted wealth
while the world burns, as it
always burns and i guess
someone somewhere is
always drinking
a nine dollar bottle of wine
and thinking to themselves well
the world burns, but at least this
isn't such a bad bottle
of wine.



rust-colored metal
 too hot in the sun to touch
 insects flashing in the wheat
 truckbed rattle, combine chaff
 a gravel road, the dust after sundown
 dead still air and iced tea in dirty jugs
 vise-grip doorhandles, WD-40,
 duct tape and denim
 case IH, john deere, dodge and chevy

cicadas in the cottonwoods,
 grasshoppers on the traintracks
 grain elevators, the smell of drought
 the sound of small towns unasleep in the heat,
 box fans and ice melting in a plastic cup
 the world book encyclopedia on a shelf
 beneath the window unit air conditioner

apple orchards, bonfire smoke
 tall grass and truck seats
 sandburs and bootlaces
 backrooms and outbuildings,
 roof-rot over
 30 years of dust and junk
 fireflies, fireworks, flooded crops
 muddy water in the ditches
 the house where my grandmother was a girl,
 stacks of *the saturday evening post*
 half a century under the floor

wind in the streets outside the watering hole
 broken bottles on the 10th street overpass
 coal trains and long-form suicide daydreams
 plato laughing in the coffee house
 french roast refills a quarter
 cigarettes and pipe tobacco
 rain on the pavement outside
 some \$5 folk rock show

frisbee in the falling air
 green grass condensation the sound of
 silence growing up around us as we ran
 oklahoma, arkansas, bad navigation,
 epic drunks, the news from iraq

9th street basements, halloween dresses,
 county blacktop, yellow line drift,

bluegrass, johnny cash
 that empty airplane sound,
 the omaha airport carpet,
 eggs over easy and the oblivion of sleep

nickel creek and lawrence kansas
 the back stairs at some house party
 j r dot with a bag of psilocybin mushrooms,
 cheap wine overnight at the bakery
 kitchen card tables and gas burner onions
 the guitar i still don't play
 dead leaves on highway 2
 bank signs in the bitter cold

jealousy and theft,
 gratitude and resignation
 the materials at hand
 bad sketches, bags of books, boxes of poems,
 manuscripts and post-it notes
 a car burning in the street on election night
 university cops rattling
 my passenger-side window
 in the dead of january

going across the ocean and giving up
 mistakes i won't make again
 lies i don't stop telling

making out in the car
 making conversation over beers
 making much of little enough

channels in the rocks, red dirt on my shoes
 wind in the trees above the tent
 night birds huge in the sky above the ocean
 windshield cracks in the wal-mart parking lot
 boardgames and front-porch vertigo
 wine, salt, resin, sand,
 black coffee, phone calls,
 postcards, scrapbook stopgaps
 silence on the line

the stories that aren't mine any more
 the pictures on her wall and the
 mixtapes meant for other people

letters it's years too late to send
things it's years too late to say
faded posters on the peeling walls

trees growing through the grayed out shingles
cowshit on the banks, fossil beads
in the creekbed, shells etched in the stone

§

there are no new thoughts
and few new experiences
maybe adulthood is just the process
of remembering that you've made
these mistakes before

for jake

in the late afternoon i found that
my copy of the new album
roky erickson just recorded
with okkervil river had arrived

it also came with a t-shirt,
featuring a line drawing by will sheff
of a much younger erickson,
which i put on before
i went out to see a show

i've been feeling sick these
last few days, and later on
when i went to bed still
wearing the shirt, a
spring storm spilling from
the gutter outside my window,
i lapsed into that kind of
disturbed, hallucinatory sleep
which often accompanies a fever

i dreamed myself trying
to produce a recording session with
erickson and the other surviving
members of the 13th floor elevators
(how many of those can there be, anyway?)

we were working in the former
backyard of the house where
i lived when i was five
or six, a bungalow in the
south-central nebraska town of
franklin – all the structures
on the property had been leveled,
rendering it a barren lot with
tattered weeds surrounded
by a chain-link fence;
the rest of the town
seemed to have suffered the
same violence – i could see
the layout of familiar streets,
but few of the trees or houses

the wind was impossible
 to keep out of the microphones;
 i kept resorting to strange
 contrivances of duct-tape and
 2x4s in an attempt to mic the drums –

the rain over boulder stopped
 some time around 2am
 i woke up and exchanged the t-shirt
 for a bathrobe, and went to the
 kitchen for some robitussin
 trying to shake off the liner-note
 biography of a guy i've never met
 and likely never will

i wonder sometimes about the habit
 of mind that produces an observant
 superstition or a certain kind
 of mystical understanding;
 the way that sympathetic
 magic can seem to lurk in
 the shadow of every motion
 the longing to believe
 (or, in turn, the fear)
 that nothing at all is casual,
 that potent contingency may
 be attached to nearly any action

i wonder about the knowledge,
 hard won and often exposed only to memory
 that we are all communicating
 more than we ever entirely know
 conducting romances and burning
 down empires in the space of a look
 or the inclination of a glance

that way lies madness
 an exit or two past sensitivity
 and i haven't got much
 time for insanity; i've
 seen too much of it
 to have any truck with the
 commonplace delusion that *crazy*
 is romantic or inspired

still, i write all these poems,
all these chickenscratch apologetics
and it often seems to me that
some intuitive doctrine of
correspondences and signifiers
nears the heart of poetry,
bound up in the impulse to salvage
meaning or assert it
in the face of a life
where so much meaning is
impossible to reckon or measure
where so much has already
gone unsaid.

the devil made the dinosaur bones #1

June 5, 2010

this work is placed in the public domain

in the event that your jurisdiction does not allow dedications to the public domain, you are hereby granted a license in perpetuity to do whatever you want with this work

source at <http://p1k3.com/>