



shorn ellipses

Keith Jones

PRAISE FOR SHORN ELLIPSES:

“This set of poems, as if made inside the eye of a hurricane (slave-dragged,
gong-tormented shoals) are like polished lenses — that show us
musical treasure-zones in the weird world.”

— **Fanny Howe**

s h o r n e l l i p s e s



This book is dedicated to William Corbett.

C O N T E N T S

weightless clutch of sea	6
clothed in crossroads, is sinking	7
echo of our inmost edges	10
language sighing to itself	11
vanishing glyph	12
wild lips a wound	13
you, like radio you, like song	15
in a field of false time	18
dazed with what we think we know	19
the imperial city surrounds, its history so blue	20
upbraided, burnt by fire	21

of shore & grief	22
has the thing by the throat	26
clutch of emblematic shore	27
blown rake of tears	29
in the dark waters below	31
of sea & twisted kelp	32
shade of, bound to you	37
shorn ellipses	42
notes	44
acknowledgments	45

it is an involvement in essence (no matter of private)

— Cy Twombly

to be blown into fragments. your death
like the islands that you loved
like the seawall that you wished to heal

— Kamau Brathwaite

WEIGHTLESS CLUTCH OF SEA

I see woven things
celestial, prodigious,
ridden out to task, pro-
fuse, line by line
gnawing at the wind's keep,
taut plane of arrival,
broad cloth caught,
loose mesh, weave
we call season
weightless clutch of sea, she says
calabash thick as alabaster
as fountain pen, as seeds
devouring time, forms slip past
prior to, as pieces of,
we, drying in the co-matter
of light

CLOTHED IN CROSSROADS,
IS SINKING

waves a fundament emphatic, undergird

the airily whole, scarlet dance

at noontime *arithmetic*

here, we glimpse eternity's jagged edge here

we feel crab ward the steady-unsteady

way of animations,

lucidities subtly notched,

all unities in transit,

under, unto, a finite will un-

done return'd to, flush'd out, washed ashore

again, calm'd —

aggrieved not by lost references.

simple touch, or stitch, temper's ricochet
in close-up fixed grip
of clot, of being's debt
which cools the fevers of night.
there, where the middle sea
began, battered relics appear
geographic, clothed in crossroads, the buoyant,
heard, adrift wound
upon the water, the long hold of blues, she says

the we in shadow, the we

in quiet shade: paint

me wide, oceanic

it says tear

& tear are

surface effects —

dawn's fright-full

keep

E C H O O F O U R
I N M O S T E D G E S

err is not a word, what rises

is an invisible estate

aslant in long missives.

you say clouds, time's hand-

cuff, referents without

a point of view.

you stitch dark planks

of white night together,

hum the great sphere,

the faint summons

of delicate surmise.

the All told in peer

& limb, echo

of our inmost edges

variations we see,

ear to window, of lilting

diaphanous light.

I see the sea thru you,

fleets of open

broken vessels

LANGUAGE SIGHING
TO ITSELF

say, it is language sighing to itself

a sentence, in long hand, long prior to letters

chalk tied to beauty's tail

reluctance spun, daylight's

pointed beak pointing where

eager the arrow is

eager the emperor is

eager to sketch his shadow

VANISHING GLYPH

at slant, throne

a raincoat of marble, she says,

don't say, I stand

for it. sun-dial perch,

bitumen & crayon

W I L D L I P S A W O U N D

arisen echo of furthest edge
argent, wild lips a wound, a swollen incision
surface effects shredded to mute, frantically thinned
like a long-dead man forever talking,
never saying a word he meant, chatter worn
as the wound over the actual
grows fonder bridles a bit
a torrent now, where need's tremor
spills out, drips, seeps presses up some rusty ledge
in you, you crawl, you slip, you over-
state the sparse till'd passage, the
graven burrow, she says, you still flounder in

voyages forgetting asymmetric
aerialist stove, warmth in deeper recesses,
you say abandoned, sink, rise,
surface again, list the haggard craft mono-chromatic, no longer in luck —
of his ilk antiphony, a new renewal delayed
long kept in pretty snares, she says, bursts which loosen,
which recall the pretty waves
of beauty's wake, airily made
barks cutting arcs
in water

Y O U , L I K E R A D I O

Y O U , L I K E S O N G

no palm'd tree, no laurel, no swan
you are sharp feeling rushed exit-
less fall ark life to infidel, like speech to stutter,
lifts an archaic curse note how day's
encumbrance took eons, she sd
hammer'd thin, fine crater lake
light, oblique hoofbeat's mad rush,
fumes of final days, turning
you, yes, contemporary,
most alive, drifting up, from long
ago, on bone-white night you,

like radio, you, like song you soften me,
strip me bare, which is why I like yr white cliffs best,
balled up into paper-whites
on a plinth beginnings
echo revenant echo
forms echo prow stern keel blue streak of oar

bled thru all aspects of
enter walls, discrepant waves, back
bone of seeing's boat hoofbeat, beat slap of skin
lost at sea sea is West
where sunset is, sea
is the weary need
of feather, of wood where I, too,
look entire to float

I N A F I E L D O F
F A L S E T I M E

no cure, ornery, first language,
then not then nothing
wrists elaborately bound,
dissolves, little by little, she says
a field of false time
it's not worth explaining
what ritual does not preserve,
my voice scribbles it

DAZED WITH WHAT WE
THINK WE KNOW

dazed with what we think we know

an anguished Adonis recedes,

repeats a world-style no more

“Petals of Fire” endlessly

muttering ... to re-invent

is elliptical, fleshy republic

of feeling grey crossings,

Marrakech

THE IMPERIAL CITY
SURROUNDS, ITS HISTORY
SO BLUE

the imperial city surrounds,

its history so blue, slurs

my lust for you, Naumachia

middle sea, middle passage,

mechanical, blind oceanic way

man overboard, woman over-

board, thrown, still thrown

leaping ...

UPBRAIDED, BURNT
BY FIRE

medusa & ovum

blood bloom

the drowning siege

of various waters

an eyelid,

an eagle's crest,

floating shades

& bounded nests,

worsted aftermath

of Iliam

on & on,

wings thinned,

upbraided, burnt

by fire

OF SHORE & GRIEF

wheels crayons house paint

suddenly panoramic,

chalk on walls,

old equestrian battles

the wine-chosen edge, she says,

is social light, is fine snow

to fountain, is

molecular

to these dark waters

audible the trap

the solitude, leagues

beneath you, unmourned

“A” is for Achilles, his circumferences,
flight in pure space.

imagine you are all interval,
pursued, pierced, halo'd in veils of sea
in veils of sand in veils

of shore & grief

& speed “in these islands

that you loved,” in these strains

of beauty’s summons, slow wheel

to steady creaks eternal

having been given to peaks,

the fortress

is hard to find, craft’s

taut curve

stretched thin

the thing you pluck

lattices like rigging
spines of leaves stones thrown,
mystic sigh skip old man is I,
little cloud is I, youth's craned waves
incandescent sweet tensile strength,
my love for you, sweet grass, cliff's kiss,
jagged limb'd coronations
of color

H A S T H E T H I N G
B Y T H E T H R O A T

outlaw ballads,

delta blues.

long convoluted lines,

has language

by the throat.

how else

to sustain

this idea

of innocence, she says

of happenstance,

gloom,

venturesome

alive to the

shallows

CLUTCH OF EMBLEMATIC SHORE

yr work had been to white-out yr capital,
the center of yr city cut its rigging, let it
float out & up & away
vanish in-
to a butterfly's kiss. orange wings, clutch
of emblematic shore. clap yr hands
& it flies away
its fine art an envelope you say it was the disappearance of
a strong kind of runaway feeling, diamond hard,
its wattage flickering
wild workhorse of night
fencepost, doorknob, window ledge
you tease this thicket depth mad as autumn,
where letters lie interrupted,
wander off full-stop & period

half-moon boats, erudite lunar flesh

descending, crane'd against the waves a relics crate,
of sea reach, afloat

a pool of light mired in the never
you are, begun again

long weary lines, I unrest you
black bird, where the white tread is, skimming the shores,
numinous

BLOWN RAKE OF TEARS

or do they, or are they, she says,

confessions

from above loss you can do

little with, bent longways

into silence, silence

worsens the roar, the wake of wave,

blown rake of tears

like Xenophon's

swirling loss

ten thousand men, attuned
to the void. a tired
cry thick, the cause,
war's inexhaustible
echo. four black girls,
Kitty Genovese,
napalm. cruel mounds
where the heart-wrench
is, where the wrong
is, where the wrong
lies in fields & seas
unburied

IN THE DARK WATERS BELOW

how language

& line repeat

in the dark waters below

Ottoman & Christian,

oarsmen soldiers slaves,

loosened like,

leaking life,

Lepanto, 1571

OF SEA & TWISTED KELP

The singer & the sea, all things are moved by love.
—Osip Mandelstam

1

graced by some secret border,
time's pretty cuff

feeling the travel
loosen

bones to give away,
lost verse horses

2

crumple yr paper cup
tiny wedge & hinge

& hollow
in the blur of you —

the sums you give
I screw to you

I feel yr breasts,
steal yr radius & heat

3

I herd yr flowers
into hills

my voice
yr glittering

address. skin
to skin,

I sense grace
in you, my perfect

kin. wolf
heart in you,

eat
my harness,

the hold I'm
in

4

traces that remain,
dark sky in its royal

slumber loop
you will never

reach
I atmosphere you,

brush & bristle
loss you seep

an intimation
of, depth of one

falling into
the other

5

you take me
nymph of time's dis-

temper, *prima facie*
shore & tide

bank of sums
you give

in this blur,
yr incumbent mask

in this echo, you give,
& give again —

me, she says,
my voice

SHADE OF, BOUND TO YOU

bound to you too elliptical

what the sun will efface in a different motif

plainest of threads speak of yr renewal the sky is a which seed

that blooms washes away cleans

is silence a crisp bed sheet canvas page

overboard & overbearing the leaping is inside

you yr hurt faraway the eyes'll face entangled fields

the sea the first

experiment no fences if desire is no fences make do

you let gold return

to unquicksilvered parts to feldspar to blind river way

let it sink back in to earth to burn

bright alone among roots quiet grubs & clusters

you who miss yr nocturnal light yr passional underground stars
warmth in what it is descending
a shiver frail it keeps in voyage salt-flake'd shimmering skin
don't you remember is *sinking* man overboard yr swollen lamb
open most
bursting within sunk under the weight of testimony lavish foam
where the middle sea began swimmer not yet free
like some gust a wind forever panting perishing final facts
there where myth went
massive what the page won't take weary of its own echo
wake in fur,
wake again here you clutch at Euripides
the moon at quarter-mast

ravish this, indigo island air summer's wheeling advance

crinkling stubbled earth to lean on

a vanishing line

heteroclitite reeds in the dying light

of holy water the old problem of the present, she says, is new

straying cloud men seized by the happy short life of labor
of sense blind to you
woman, you say, is an old sail cloth her pronoun
yellowing watch how the moon slicks
the river way mirrors what will is will creeps through topples its virgin self
as old ways of earth cluster round
as present crafts conceal you as tidal winds reach
further in & out woven child rags make you coast
thru salt & twisted kelp wishing too much
voyage proof, this century
terror white

S H O R N E L L I P S E S

while I fall away the grandeur alas

shrinks yr stare's

visage, a fountain-

full of thoughts. it's having been

there, by yr side, she says

forgotten, arches through which

where weeds once were

were now but love's

bouquet. the now of whimsy's

bequest.

after all, of much

decision, a promise,

the paradigm's

lovely hoax. so you say again,

& do again, & go hard after

the bristling hope. polish the sky, pristine

little shoes you walk the heavens with.

of course, you cannot bear what you

cannot hold, apostrophes

& their matters

of possession

which ask of you,

of all those things, she says,

you cannot bear — love

love love — I dare

you

NOTES

These poems engage with, think through, or alongside of, &, at times, embed titles of Cy Twombly paintings or, occasionally, as with the poems “weightless clutch of sea,” “clothed in crossroads, is sinking,” “vanishing glyph,” “dazed with what we think we know,” “the imperial city surrounds, its history so blue,” & “of shore & grief” — the materiality of his sculptures or drawings. These poems enact a fascination, in language, or as utterance, with Twombly’s color, his line’s errandries, with his vanishing figures & sounds, with his sense of “history” as partial, palimpsestic, under erasure, & variously “voiced.” But if Twombly is a painter of the Middle Sea, these poems seek the open wound that is the *longue durée*, the absences, the ongoingness of the Middle Passage & the beautiful ruin we all still are because of it — “beautiful,” that is, if “love” is understood to drive its redress.

The poems “upbraided, burnt by fire” & “of shore & grief” echo, engage, allude to Twombly’s “Fifty Days at Iliam” series. This latter poem embeds (& carries with) a line from Kamau Brathwaite’s, which is drawn from the book’s epigraph.

The poem “blown rake of tears” conjures, subsumes, & troubles the temporality of Twombly’s painting, “Anabasis (Xenophon), 1983,” a tangle of proper names & of lives omitted, of various presents & pasts that overlap & blur.

The poem “in the dark waters below” engages, honors, contemplates the deep porousness of Twombly’s “Lepanto” series, the opening it still is for thinking the present.

The headnote to “of sea & twisted kelp” is from Osip Mandelstam’s “Hard Night” (tr. Christian Wiman).

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Keith Jones is the author of the chapbooks *blue lake of tensile fire* (Projective Industries, 2017), *the lucid upward ladder* (Verse, 2016), *Fugue Meadow* (Ricochet Editions, 2015), and *Surface to Air; Residuals of Basquiat* (Pressed Wafer, 2012). His manuscript *echo's errand* was a finalist for the 2016 Numinous Orisons, Luminous Origin Literary Award (Agape Editions) and the 1913 Prize for 1st Books (1913 Press). His chapbook *the lucid upward ladder* was a finalist for the 2015 Tomáš Šalamun Prize (Verse Magazine). His poems have appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Chicago Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Flag + Void*, *No Infinite*, *The Winter Anthology*, *Verse*, and elsewhere. His prose has appeared in *Consequence Magazine* and *Stylus*, the blog of the Woodberry Poetry Room, Harvard University. He lives in Jamaica Plain and teaches at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

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