shorn ellipses

Keith Jones
“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
shorn ellipses
This book is dedicated to William Corbett.
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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
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
err is not a word, what rises
is an invisible estate
aslan in long missives.
you say clouds, time’s handcuff, 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
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
at slant, throne

a raincoat of marble, she says,

don’t say, I stand

for it. sun-dial perch,

bitumen & crayon
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
YOU, LIKE RADIO
YOU, LIKE SONG

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,

balléd 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
IN A FIELD OF FALSE TIME

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

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, slurs
my lust for you, Naumachia
middle sea, middle passage,
mechanical, blind oceanic way
man overboard, woman over-
board, thrown, still thrown
leaping ...
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
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
Has the thing
by the throat

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

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graced by some secret border,
time’s pretty cuff

feeling the travel
loosen

bones to give away,
lost verse horses
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
I herd yr flowers
into hills

my voice
yr glittering

dress. skin
to skin,

I sense grace
in you, my perfect

kin. wolf
heart in you,

eat
my harness,

the hold I’m
in
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
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
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 un quicksilvered 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
heteroclite 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
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
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 errantries, 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 (& tarries 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).
Many thanks to the editors at Denver Quarterly where “wild lips a wound” first appeared as “From Six Songs for Cy Twombly: VI.”
Biographical Note

Keith Jones is the author of the chapbooks *blue lake of tenoise 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 Tomaž Šalamun Prize (Verse Magazine). His poems have appeared in *Barrow Street, Chicago Review, Denver Quarterly, Flag + Void, No Infinite, The Winter Anthology, Verve,* 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.