

Stephen Paul Miller

MOVING PIECES

Maybe there's a cushion
 inside this couch.
I know I'm pregnant.
 Just push and it goes
Like a watermelon pit.

We can't go back and change it
But everything we do does.

This class is going in that direction.

The wormhole takes you
 to a magnetic thread where
Scott Joplin and Irving Berlin meet
And the Great American Songbook opens.
I tell you this class is going nowhere.
And you say that's what you like about it.
All this nowhere is fine and full
But I get uncharacteristically sanctimonious
 and insist on death
 to be reborn but
No one, not even Meher Baba,
 can forgive you if they
 never blamed you.
If you were never here
 you can never go away.
The cascades
Don't disturb anybody.
They drop in the big "as is"

trusting the two ends of the
established fraction
I proudly work. Sometimes Joplin drops in.
That news spreads rapidly
as when Voltaire and Franklin met
Or Pasternak died. Word rippled all over
right away
In music. Everyone hears
and sees it but huge

Portions of humanity sour on it
Staying in their den.
Who can blame them?
Everything is a short-term solution.
If we were never here
and thus can't die
We huddle in the invisible
And come back with the dead
perpetually, every moment
Forever going up to the sky
For another chair. Intrigued,
Chopin keeps his notes tight
and the spaces in-between
Tingle and stop and tingle and stop
Meeting up at a water fountain
That is a bouquet of health
Within the deepening Debussy
Where I expected to find an answer.
Did I expect to find an answer?
No. The opposite. You just open the piano
And forget everything,
Drive a bunch of little cars
Off their tires until we're able
To rest for good measure
And Brahms bubbles up
Through the Sergio Leone film.
The air shapes us. What we do is where we are
So that poetry is the environment,
And the complete package.

CLASS TO NOWHERE

I'm excited about not being excited.
Hey that's one way to lose weight
I'm still not hungry!!!
Relevance spits me out
Let's see how long I can take
The crack in my dreams.
Is that a question? Okay.
Who wants to play *Millionaire*?
"Is *that* a question?" Yes and no.
Who was president after Franklin Roosevelt?
"I'm not an encyclopedia?"
You can ask a friend.
"Truman."
Very good.
You only have one lifeline left.
You can ask the class.
How many bones in the human body?
"206. At birth 270."
What day did Frank O'Hara die?
"July 25, 1966."
What comedian died the same day?
Time is up? The answer is Lenny.
My son was born exactly 30 years to the day
After Frank O'Hara and
Lenny Bruce died.
The end of Part One Continued.
I'm still not hungry.
Is this poem better
Than going to the movies
 or watching TV?
"It could be
If it were a bad movie.
Hey, now it's better than
 good TV!
Poetry is love, but it's not phony
Even if you take out
 all the phoniness there's
 still some love there for you.

We just splash on the ink.
But there's something good about it.
It's almost magic but
 with lots of tiny pixilated border lines
Startlingly irregular when seen from here.”
All the borders remove you.
But now you're saying you are
 totally removed from all
 that kind of removal.
There's love underneath,
 but it's more about poetry.
Love's tirade is always already.
I'm just blazing it.
My poem is in a poem.
No one here knows how or when
Franklin Roosevelt was elected
But I feel warm spring air.
Thank you for letting me
Make you listen.
Do you want to say something
 with my pen?
It's okay. I want to be
 a different kind of teacher
but I'm just fucked up normal.
All I do is take attendance.
When I'm wild, the class controls me.
This is such a good class
It doesn't notice the teacher falling asleep.
As I shed pounds
The class is calm and controlled
Yet warm and spring like,
Dreamy against a moment's skin,
Like a building's upside-down foundation,
A captive rose with its bloom cut,
We swing on each severed downbeat
Becoming nothing more and more
So it's hard to answer your letter
Though it'll attack soon.
I lie between two flowers
Among other insecure texts
And suddenly everything feels left to right
Sliding sideways making me

Forget all the chest pains because after all

I'm just settling in.

A fine pink mist is the real catastrophe
But everyone looks you up as you just keep writing.
Maybe I'll lose my apartment.

Maybe it won't be okay
But I'll still be crummy and up-for-grabs.
The holiday is in itself retching, pointing at you.
I'm not all I say.

I am part of everything passing
In your eyes, voided from
Continuing to happen.
Banned from the internet.
Removed from time.
Goodbye, So long, See you later
But I won't know it, will you?
We talk to our dead pets like children—
They know better than to know—
And maybe we regress.
Do you think we fly?
All of a sudden?
What difference does it make?
Just another cop directing thoughts,
More and more traffic in my head.
Go slow. People like me because
I don't cause accidents
This poem is about losing weight.
I will be over when I lose it.
John Cage said he'd die in perfect health.

There's dinner in the car
But I won't eat it.
There's a bell on my phone.
Let me fall into it
Democracy's at stake.
Meat and high protein waffles.
It doesn't have to make sense.
They're super-fiber too.

I'm beginning to lose everything.
It's my way of being practical.
If Keats was the father of negative capability
Trump will be the grandfather.

He's nothing but negative.
On the other side of the airy leger,
Shakespeare is in my stomach.
Thank you for providing just the right amount of flourish.

Is that Bach?
Bach and I collaborate on this beautifully free health dispensary
Playing late Joplin, more like jazz, a few
 peaks and birds
now a slope down fueled by love.
 Yay!

It was a sleigh ride. Fun! Joplin
wrote a very proper waltz
once in the 1890s which
I never heard before I got into
him, one he wrote before the Maple
Leaf Rag. It's actually comparable to
to Chopin. I have to concentrate
to get this right.

One two three. One two three.
Flourish and stroll. Flourish
 and stroll. Flourish and stroll.
We waltz home together,
 Scott Joplin and me.
 Now we're falling off the peak.
 I'll answer the question

I raised about negative capability later.
 You know Trump and Keats?
But first let me get off the train
 in the Twilight Zone and
 walk in the 1890s.

It's a very proper year
 But funny.

There's something to be said for
 flying through history.
Let's go to the future to Debussy.
 There aren't too many people

left. I might not be here
but I sense it madly.
Don't cry for me, Debussy.
Duke Ellington still plays you.
One urgent plea and I'm out.
I think I'm okay
I come after the girl with
the flaxen hair and Gershwin
It's nice. I wish Sarah Silverman
would stop tweeting me. I told
her to stop. I already agree
with her and it's not funny
anymore.
I walk the plank with Gershwin
and it's nice and ear wormy.
He's just dripping up the court.
Sometimes that's what it's all about
though I love when Bach bangs out
structure.
Frank O'Hara says the poem lies
Between two lovers.
Mary MacGregor sings "Torn Between Two Lovers."
"What a way to go," a DJ says,
And Brahms lies between two loves,
The left hand and the right hand and the chaos
Lushly charged lyrical lines. Mmmm.
But I can't tell you how much
I hate you for charging
me twice for "extra guacamole"—
Once for the "guac," twice for the "extra."
What kind of sophistry is that?
Guac is always extra. I assume that with you.
You desecrate the world but I forgive you.
Still, even though I know it doesn't matter
I miss myself as myself.
I have to be in the world to be human.
I miss myself as myself anyway
But that was a long time ago.
None of this makes any sense now whatsoever.
Let's go to the peak where everything stops and refreshes
Burning false consciousness
You know I'm kidding, right?

Not exactly. They don't just stop
At investigating political enemies there.
I am the so-called president, right?
I know it remains to be seen, but still
I am the chosen one, defiant
because I was elected by God.
Anyway this poem is just a diet. Two bananas.
Are you ready for the skinny Donald.
Somebody better learn how to fight my cancer
Before I board Marine One.
Clearly my health is

something. I should
start thinking about
turkey melt.

As Benjamin talked of buildings and architecture
This is just somewhere to be with your normal
Degree Zero Un/Attention—hanging out to flicker.
I like you being here. We cuddle.
Something that carries weight
directs the flow,
All the contraptions fall in fire.
Could you unblock my valves?
That would be dynamic.
Please, before
The pot calls the kettle treif.
We should never lose sight
of it ha ha ha coffee.
So many little things to do.
You're just the top layer.
You "you" all over deep time.
I'm utterly encrusted in you.
My you has a piano attached.
The Frances Perkins of Music,
you turned social work
into sound and therapeutic structure,
You know, some lovely
Brahms and dialysis.
By the way, this is not hearsay,
this is not a leak, this is
not a whistleblower complaint,

it's not a memorandum
of a phone conversation.
You saw the president himself
do it on the White House lawn.
Now that we know where
all the policy is coming
from how can we
use it?
God told me I would be
the last president
But God is deeply disturbed
and distracted.
God is just another social
worker playing

the piano.
Sweet unsalted cashews.
Freeze.
The ocean swallows all the water
Then goes back into its den.
Rivers of tears.
The burn bounces.
Fifth Avenue thanks you
for visiting me in its bunker.
Time to start again.
Cashews.
Turkey bacon & fixings.
How simple.
I'm falling into
something but
Ultimately life stinks
Because it's all about me.
Still you should be proud of your art.
All poetry reconciles the two—life and art—
Like an all accepting god
Who is on the move
I finally like his casual air.
My love turns to air
And my shoes to cobblestones,
Reinventing the naked
Precious subtle sweat
Looping in a spherical hexagram—

A Selectric ball—
Imprinting—but
I don't even know
 when I know
Rosemarie Castoro's
 gone.
So much to ask her
 but just as well.
What is this all about
 if not to find another
 model
and models never work
 except when they
 do
but then we fear
 any model
I need a real model

To place my weight
Before soaring from the lip
Of the big garbage surf
floating like
 three-dimensional
 paper

I didn't realize the scope of your features.
Who cares if I can't make out your face?
Let's try everything

Including the best possible government

 a little monkey morphs.

I'm looking at it from myself.
Your spaceship made this possible.
Your talent is remarkable.
The best part of your third film
Is when the exploding castle pieces turn to pies.
To Google it is to see heaven from heaven
Proving once again the distraction worth it.
When I was your confessional apparatus
You absorbed me and spit me out

To fly like a pit
After I confessed poorly but good enough,
Volunteering everything I half know—
A Louis the whatever house
After the world's windows open
Challenging suitors to close them so that
Socialism is nothing but a human face.

The show's over
 but you come back
To watch
 the World Series
 more than anything
 but it's cancelled.
The spherical hexagram
 munches.

That's the only line I don't get
Before a ball destroys everything,
Everything the eye was a part of.
Give the world some air.

Exhausted I fall asleep in my rowboat.
Where will all this negative capability lead it now?
The earth cuts the light and sugar, drawing us in.
Sometimes it even draws us with us.
We come over the hill to be picked up by another camera.
Until now the light had been dark. You could only see
Our golden outlines captured in a revolving sugar cube much like
Fred Astaire's turning one in *Royal Wedding* spelling the world backwards
 As we fly end-to-end.

This is where we came in.
How do I stop it?
What is it framing?
Motion as an image.
How perverse.
Now it is showing
Situations that can't happen
In mist and dust
Till experience mitigates you
And thread forms you
Into a Muybridge series
No one can control that is

Like everything else
Made in a camera.

When I get the dailies back
I animate the eyeballs
And wash the pain off the models.
Who has drawn this?
No one, I hope.
I keep seeing this early stuff—
No more naked body issues.
It doesn't matter where this lands.
I am not the center like you,
All forms—
A snake making movements
 out of people, are now.
How wonderfully you splice us
On a chain that never ends.
And your splices pop too.

Horace said literature informs and delights
But when you inform you also delight.

In a way you ruined my life but I feel perfect balance.

Loving just enough brings subtly perfect balance.

I thank my Utopia inside
For giving me a little product.
That little dream machine
Is all I ever needed.
How sexy destruction is.
What is it?
The silence and the tongue are not one.
Like a dog frozen in amber
Time cannot forget you.
Suddenly I'm dancing

DONALD TRUMP CREATES A SPACE

November 4, 2019. Donald Trump creates a space
For Senator Rand Paul to materialize at the president's rally.
Paul says he knows the National Security Council whistleblower's name
And then says that he worked for Biden. But he doesn't say the name.
The senator wants the press to say it, telling them to "Do your job."
The crowd repeats "Do your job" "Do your job" "Do your job."
Well, yes, the press would be more credible than Trump or Paul but wait a second.
Donald Trump has cleared a space for me to even think about this
And anchor other thoughts to it. That's smart
Because it's not like you just see things clearly
All at once and at first.

Trump gives everyone a pair of glasses.
He doesn't have to know anyone's name.
The glasses he gives you are microscopes magnifying
Free-floating slurs that make everyone uneasy.
But lots of people don't see smears and affronts when they put on their Trumps.
Ryan Zimmerman, the first-baseman of the World Series Champion Washington Nationals
Genuinely thanks "President Trump" for "keeping us safe."
Zim doesn't pick up on him threatening a Purple Heart hero doing his duty
Because that's all he seems to know how to do,
Trump calling Lieutenant Colonel Vindman "human scum"
For saying Donald was making us unsafe by, you know, not only hijacking
Foreign and defense policies for his own benefit but I'll add rolling over
For dictators and oligarchs and letting allies, who died
Fighting Isis hand-to-hand. die even more.
The whistleblower's name and complaint
Are not vital now because they created a space
To back up its assertions with other verifiable evidence
Such as records of smoking gun conversations
And Lt. Col. Vindman's sworn testimony among many others.

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My sister-in-law on Staten Island says she'll vote for Trump again
But is shocked to learn he called
Perceived enemies like Vindman human scum.
And maybe he shouldn't risk being misunderstood
By calling some Neo-Nazis "good people."
She understands normalizing and valorizing

White Nationalist sentiments can have real world consequences
In Pittsburgh and New Zealand and elsewhere.
She realizes a president's stigmatizing and baseless accusations
Against you for not swearing loyalty to him
Are not the way to go to for her grandchildren's future. Before we talked
She thought Trump had been a pleasant change. "Some changes are good," I tell her.
"And Bernie would be refreshing
Though none of the Democratic candidates is perfect.
Still, none of them would be horrifying as Trump."
How do you think she'll vote?

I admit I wrote this for Trump voters.
My students on Staten Island maybe.
The idea was to draw them in, not be preachy,
But it didn't work. My touch wasn't light enough.
They saw Trump's downsides as mere "politics,"
Stuff that doesn't concern them.
They thought they were open-minded.

Politics equals what they refuse to decode or "read."
It's funny how Trump asks you to "Read the Transcription,"
Meaning you should read it in his light
Giving new meaning to what Diogenes meant when
Alexander the Great asked him what gift he could bestow upon him.
He could have anything. What do you want Diogenes?
He said, "Would you please get out of my light?"

In a way, Diogenes was asking for a transparent eyeball free of tyranny and power.
Obviously, Nixon was asking you to read the Watergate Transcripts within his chosen lights.

William Barr framed the Mueller Report in a light making it impossible to read.
He didn't even try to contextualize or normalize it.
I give up.

NO GRAVITY AND SMOOTH LIGHT

My wish comes back from nothing
A thing that will work because it embraces the gaps
which breeds skies and clouds in them.
This is content, a basis from which mist may be formed.

The way life doesn't have any meaning but the sensation of
it does, how things come out of things,
The way it's hard to go out and make any headway—a day
in Brooklyn, for instance,
The honest people who serve us best
See where it is and go lock it.

An appraisal of the environment that became
black in his shadow.
Let him feel he's explored all avenues bursting
through the chains of similarity but behind the
times in the night in the mainstream of day time
in the harvest alright that floated.

Here is us from the bottom up:

Undoubtedly life filled up before consciousness
blanks,
Something metaphysical tinkled in his infinite
knowledge,
I mean ineptitude to spill stupid forms.
That was why everything was cut so well, everything the
eye was a part of.
You might as well admit this as orange blocks,
tangerines, bellwethers, directives being flaunted.