

THE WIFE OF THE LEFT HAND

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Published in the United Kingdom in 2007 by Shearsman Books Ltd
58 Velwell Road
Exeter EX4 4LD
www.shearsman.com

ISBN-13 978-1-905700-06-6

ISBN-10 1-905700-06-7

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DESIGN Megan Mangum, Words That Work



The publisher gratefully acknowledges financial assistance from Arts Council England.


for Richard



And I look at my distant words.
They are more yours than mine.

— Pablo Neruda

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ALMANAC

Midnight tides answer
the new (new coppery
coin new smudge of not
night) the new
October moon.

There is a window. There is
a window and it knocks
in its frame. Everywhere
women press the heels
of hands to eyes. Swaying
and unsteady. The bottle
green depth of the Atlantic
has been calculated
within inches. There are
watermarks six inches above
the baseboards in the parlor.
No wind-burned summer
girls pace thirsty riverbeds
for water glass, colorless.
In August a meteor
shower was promised but
didn't deliver. Bluish clouds
gather in an unfamiliar
arrangement, triangulation
of sky stars sky: blueprint
of who knows what.
Read a sundial; pattern
everything after today's
perfectly horizontal light.
Mercury is visible
in the earliest morning
hours if you know
what you're looking for.

ON SUMMER STREET

Light is a way of organizing
a picture, subjects newly
ordered. At a table before

a window we watch him walk
away, our mud-soaked brother half-
drowned; there was anticipation,

the expectation of a faint pleasure
in the seams of his work shirt; he
lays his subtle indictment at our feet.

We wait. Coffee goes cold. Nearby
a short-skirted pickpocket lifts
billfold, keys on a silver chain.

Sister of our discontent.
Wait. We wait. For what, no one
can be sure. An absence filled

with webs. Time will tell
it has told me all it promised.
The focus of glass, the frame.

This is the narrative of a house
(heartless I am not asleep)
the narrative of a house

with its unswerving spine exposed.

THE WIFE OF THE LEFT HAND

The backlit town-
hall clock mistaken
for a low-hung moon keeps

the town fast.
She the consort
the comely the small getting

smaller. It is unnatural
this want for the red
mark of the second hand.

Lopsided impressions
otherwise empty
air, fish and

secrets. Hurry and gone
and you know
full well cannot

hold up, cannot bear her
weight; this is
the year of without.

She speaks bluntly
does not embellish
nor beautify.

Those morning girls
play poolside
bridge—smooth legs, tennis

skirts and tall glasses; they
sing her to the end
of the line.

Luxury of what
sweet put hands to, can mend.
Oh, little daughter

of the radio
wait and wait
for that suggestive

slip of voice.
Her unhappiness is a blur, a thumb-
smear on a window and

she is becoming
indulgent, sweaty,
a little wicked.

In her house it is
midnight all day.

WEDDING PARTY

Such a letter of human history, a song and
the whole town singing.

The bride is luxury
and utility she is

the synonym of sex.
She aspires to want nothing

not a window or tower not paintbrushes
not a slip bolt- lock. She is newly

extravagant: *I had red hair and what
was I going to do with that?* Newly

sacred. To marry is twin and
tangle. A clear plastic bubble cups

each pill hormones suspend
further mystery.

In this city it rains even
in the hallways

of fine hotels. She thought
she'd move toward

the skyline
some inevitable next.

A BIOGRAPHY OF SALOME

1. Salome in Summer

first touch (fingers to
wrist). the humidity
misuses everything, curls
bark away from
tree trunks. first gift (so
memorably red, the
blossom, even as it
wilted and undid
itself). when wind
shifts among
waist-high weeds
and dry shadow, she
knows the seasons
will change. first kiss
(swollen, the bee-
sting on her shoulder
unbearable—the heat
absurd). in haste she
bathes with one hand. the
water will not make her
different but her
skin won't ever
feel like this again.

2. Salome Stares at the Sun

The blue inevitable, the circling
black rim of not light is
the space between what was
and what next is (did she
know it would be like
this?), the shivering
moment before sleep when
her body vanishes. It is easy
to look too long. Eyes
slip out of focus, things
blur from shape to
color. Before the world burns
white, she sees the familiar curves
of lip, hip, shoulder,
the form she loved. The fine
hideous body, brown as the drying grass,
strikes her as unforgettable
in the second before she slides
behind the eyelid's
veil.

3. One Day is Just like Another

Because when my
mother strokes my hair, when
she pulls her fingers through,
wraps it in a snaking braid, ties it
back, I am the most beautiful
woman in this or any city. From
this window, unfaithful
limbs block my view.
One sees only steps to
the courtyard door, dim
shadow of a man. Never the man.
Because women leave any room I enter.
Because once I nearly drowned and
this doesn't happen to everyone.
Found myself choking and transparent
on the riverbank. Because, after
that, I became reckless. I still taste
sand and clear blue panic. Anyone
can see my arms are strong
as a man's, powerful as
a swan's striking neck. Because
their eyes move over me as casually
as hands travel a glossy banister.
I daily crave a sugary thing
dissolving on my tongue, the
sweet impression. My lover's name

a chant I can't keep myself
from saying. Because we are
talking about midnight.
Saying again. Because the air
in my curtained rooms flashes
clean as eucalyptus. One day.
One day is just like another.
Because I hear them say *she is only....*
I lean from the window each night
to see which moon will rise.