

Last City

Brian Anthony Sneed  
Wilmington, North Carolina

Bachelor of Arts, The University of North Carolina-Asheville, 2007

A Dissertation (or Thesis) presented to the Graduate Faculty  
of the University of Virginia in Candidacy for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy or Master of Arts or Master of Science or Master of Fine Arts

Department of English

University of Virginia  
May, 2014

Last City

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the following publications in which some of these poems first appeared:

*Arion*, “Persephone,” “Phthisis: A Letter”

*Asheville Poetry Review*, “The Temple”

*Beloit Poetry Journal*, “The Road”

*Harvard Review Online*, “Flamenco”

*Ninth Letter*, “Lord’s Prayer”

*Southern Humanities Review*, “The Crystal Cave,” “Stratis the Sailor at Eleusis”

*storySouth*, “Again for the First Time”

*The Hollins Critic*, “The Hermit, Having a Lantern”

*Third Coast*, “Ghosts”

*Virginia Quarterly Review*, “Last City,” “Reconstruction”

New Year on Pleasure Island / 2  
Ghosts / 3  
Again for the First Time / 4  
Squatters / 5  
The River of the Given / 6  
Study for two figures / 8  
Blodeuwedd / 9  
Phthisis: A Letter / 10  
Persephone / 11  
Lord's Prayer / 14  
The Hermit, Having a Lantern / 15  
The Crystal Cave / 16  
Stratis the Sailor at Eleusis / 17  
Shaman Takes Both Legs / 18  
The Island / 20  
The Temple / 21  
After a Suicide / 23  
Reconstruction / 24  
Ephesus / 25  
The Road / 27  
Alexandria Duet / 28  
Ars Poetica / 33  
A Sound Eye / 34  
Ellipsoidal / 35  
Salt / 36  
Flamenco / 37  
My reason for remaining / 39  
Last City / 40

“There is no new land, my friend, no new sea,  
For the city will follow you...”

- C.P. Cavafy

## New Year on Pleasure Island

What I did not know to make made itself  
in vestigial hours between two o'clock

and dawn, when the shapes of birds  
stitch together in my mind, and a single

cicada peels the air. Each letter I write  
returns to water. I start one now and already

the flashy ceiling of a sentence  
begins to fade, and I am left with nothing

but the island and its circuitous thought  
like the bulb shards of sunsets in the reeds.

Without going to the place I had to go.  
Without any of the particular things

I was told that I needed to make my life,  
I walk again down this desolate bank, sitting

with the occasionally given happiness  
of a saucer with the last opaque drops

fingered, as the wet sand is fingered  
by a blue roving thumb. There is no set time

for the clouds to lose their inherited gold,  
no moment when the wind will stop

and the stenciled islands far out  
melt into an even line. The last of

the season inserts its sun-wide button  
into the waiting hole. The year is closed.

## Ghosts

They have come in the night and cut down  
all the Bradford Pears. Now I walk  
beneath nothing, the severed half-row  
and their whiteness gone. The hum  
of the chainsaw, lingering in the eaves and  
doorways like the pus of absence – the place  
of their bodies where I watched  
in Spring, a stranger then, your hand  
pluck a white blossom, cupping it in the palm  
like your very own corner in the spotless.  
Now I enter it, fit my body to the wound  
of them not there, thinking that I owed it  
to myself for their sake, just this once  
to be alive with what echoes: a foot,  
a hum, a cat, a lamp, a key. The wound  
that emptied you still emptying.

## Again for the First Time

It is possible to have everything,  
like listening for a music in the music.  
Somehow I am walking down Patton  
and Walnut, and somehow it is there –  
the primordial quivering, catching a whiff  
of magnitude down a side street:  
a quality of sun and air, or the pairing  
of two dead leaves on the sidewalk just so.  
Turning, I pass a blonde woman in a turtleneck,  
a dog tied to a bench and bam! find  
the man who owes me twenty dollars.  
It is possible to have everything, or at least  
twenty dollars, which is also everything  
when I spend it on a Death in the Afternoon  
for my woman and myself, the champagne  
and absinthe mixed to form a sort of cloud.  
Like when I walked the Rue Delambre, at night,  
blossoming inward like a chrysanthemum  
for a small view of the Seine, and thought  
for once, surely now is enough. To arrive  
this late and still be the first. Like the body  
saying, *again for the first time*. What  
is everywhere offers itself, again, itself.



## Squatters

By doing nothing

they are building a room for the rain.  
In April sparrows fly in. October,  
and they rake the leaves into a wall

to give the silence something to do.  
Sometimes one of them will hear  
music coming from behind the door

but when he looks to see, it is only  
the cold night sky. When they sleep  
noises come out, like hands unfolding

from the stone: a slur of bare feet,  
or the clink like a thrush prodding  
an invisible hole. After ten years

it is theirs – all of it. The gardens  
and the sinks. The broken window  
in the small ruined wall looking out

on another window. The dead lovers  
Maro and Renald, still loitering on  
the stairs, hoisting the same transparent

jug of wine. All of it, but the room  
for the rain, with the roof half-eaten  
by the bright mineral light of the moon.

## The River of the Given

Let it go, that which you gave to me.  
Put it in the water and let it float  
or sink as it can, without our help,  
without our touching it each time  
the old need arises, and the reaching  
muscle starts again. Put it in  
the water and see if it folds  
to one side, or manages to pull along  
straight and even on top of its own  
reflection, with its bright string  
attached to the edge of something  
far out. Without nourishment,  
without the miraculous human DNA  
threading its tiniest bone to ours –  
watch and see how far it goes  
on the food of its own breath,  
like a pharaoh bundle drifting  
among the fingerbumps of the reeds.  
Give it back to where you found it  
beneath the foam and debris,  
weighing less than its shadow  
on the air, before you spoke it a body  
and the rest: heat, noise, name –  
times when you did not know  
you touched, and an invisible blood  
passed into the thought and grew heavy,

until it sprouted hair, teeth. Put it  
in the water now and let it go  
to where the river starts over,  
to where the parts of us gradually  
flake off, and it can be again  
someone's food, someone's joy.

Study for two figures

Like the human shadow, if you were to remove  
a single ingredient – say, the soul  
all would collapse, like a building made of rain  
and probably with the sound of a dozen  
unseen people clearing their throats. You were so  
tiny then, like a painting on the air,  
torn apart by a thought or the slightest dark  
of water, I did not know where I touched  
if my hand went nearly through. Like that.

And how was I to have known, that day  
I took you to the amphitheatre, which of the elements  
conspired, and to have removed even one –  
the traveling hyacinth, or the memory of torchbugs  
in the mown grass – would suddenly erase  
the small, chalk-colored road being drawn.

Blodeuwedd

Foxglove. Foot of hawslip. Slender  
nettle. Her ankles crackling over  
the moss like tiny bells. That she is, or at least  
might be a woman made of flowers enters  
the humbox of the bee. I coveted each  
of her bodies in the long grass, the way  
a single thought from her would nudge  
a tulip in the crowded stamens. The tree  
for example, with its scarified circles –  
permanent, unfathomable – she counts  
her age in lovers, the pink and russet  
of her affections stained gradually, like  
the warmth of hands after they have left.  
Now she dances alone beneath the moon's  
garden, with the glinting of the petals  
like flecks of spittle from another severed head.

Phthisis: A Letter

Kind of you to show me your hand  
after the lung had been coughed up.

Over a period of thirty-one days,  
the tissues and veins swollen with

crystallized oxygen, your white palm  
holding so many warm rose petals.

How I would sit and, during those  
long hours, listen to your small voice

grown monstrous in the chamber,  
like a half-breath navigating

the interior of an instrument, passing  
the valved and hammered walls

that made it huge. And when you spoke  
I would pretend not to notice

the papery red darting out and back in  
from your lips, like a second tongue.

You, alive without the words. You,  
who carried them until now. What

will they do with you in Hades  
when you have to breathe the air,

and so respond with a rasp  
of your remaining half-lung,

like the sound of a hand  
digging in a pocket.

Persephone

Again she goes aground, seeking love  
in the mouths of the little fish

nibbling the vein-blue toes  
of the shipwrecked. *Death being male*

*marries the body.* Her white hand  
dripping on the oar as the ferryman,

whistling Dixie, remarks, but hasn't she  
come here before? Enough times perhaps

to memorize the iridescent sky  
of the underground,

or how the last breath repeats  
into the back of the throat, moth-winged,

or the pivot the blood makes  
to interfere with the act,

as if his memory were a thing,  
like a spearhead, the body

could dislodge. Now she sees it  
appear on the water: the tower

made of ash and teeth: the crowning  
minarets positioned above

stately double doors, and the nearly  
perceptible stillness beneath.

Yet having these,  
the decomposing wealth of the aeons

he summons her  
from the gaze of heaven,

tasked with the impossible:  
to be a wife

in the place where nothing lives.  
*Death being male*

*marries the body, but only  
to mine is he faithful.* For the first

thousand years she watches his breathing  
in the night and feels something,

not love, a sort of grief  
that hardens into a body

and becomes hers, sneaking out  
to the libraries in order to learn

the language of the earthworms,  
to become, if nothing else

less a tourist. But all they said was  
*My Lady, not My Lady, when did you realize*

*that you would never be free?*  
For five thousand years she wore

his body so well that she saw it  
in all things: stars, moon,

their reflection on the iridescent sky,  
and pretended that the beauty

of her sorrow was enough. Now  
she enters the widening hall

of her home, descending the stairs  
past the multiple colored layers

with her just-pubescent feet  
vanishing on the marble



as far above the ocean  
a gate of winds opens, hinges

smooth as the first winter,  
and I toss awake

to a chill in the bed sheets  
and the howling of some distant dog.

## Lord's Prayer

Lord, rescue me from the desire to be loved  
by you, or any other earthless,  
cumulus, *yacht among the clouds*  
god of heaven and going up.  
I have a god and he tells me  
we all go out, and even better  
we go to fungus and live in tunnels  
underground, with pipsissewa  
and his nets of sweaty bells.  
How could you account for our  
small happiness amid the chandeliers  
with all that caviar on your chin?  
Her body with the doors flung open.  
Lying down next to her and sin.  
I perform the calculations of gentleness  
and she gives in, every time.

## The Hermit, Having a Lantern

That it shone its octagonal window  
on the rock was all but expected.  
The mountain and its runnels. The moon  
as it careened widely over him, its crystalline  
loudness hurried by otters. I could see  
where the road became cliffs and air,  
the guardrail removed long ago  
by the Tuatha de Dannan. The sieve  
of clouds uniformly blue. I wanted  
carefully from the folds of his robe,  
blue-gray against the chasm of rock  
but not alone, thanks partially to Mssr.'s  
Will Rider and Arthur Edward Waite,  
who kindly thought to ink a small dog  
chewing at the ankle. And myself,  
unvisited as yet by the planets over Uranus  
and the cartwheel of his sickle through the wheat,  
swallow it whole, the lantern and the dog.

## The Crystal Cave

It was something else entirely. The cave  
and its vastness, sure, and the old man  
walking the fishing paths to the ground.  
But it wasn't made of crystal. More like  
the gaunt peaks of the Burren: all cavern  
with its lists of lichen and pocked rock.  
I picture his beard, twig-burdened, full  
of gray patches, the pale torchlight  
turning veins on his skin to fish scale:  
Merlyn walking over bones of puffins,  
bones of sea albatross, speaking a door  
in no language into the limestone wall.

Stratis the Sailor at Eleusis

*after Seferis*

Who will follow him to Hell,  
along the icy bank with its mirrors made of stone  
and the sound of water dripping in a distant land.  
The hole in the grass is full of stars  
after two thousand years, even the birds  
point their songs west and east, always away  
from the Levant. *Here a braid  
in the ground where the wheel spat up,  
here a sprig of rue berries  
carrying the dark residue of her lips—*  
No one says how the earth opened,  
if it was quietly or loud, or like  
the sound of a three-hundred-year-old tree  
snapping at the roots, or how the moon felt  
shining on the rape. Still,  
the door and the wound are holy,  
the old men say, with the bones of thrushes  
curled in satchels around their throats  
to absorb the Evil Eye.

Shaman Takes Both Legs

*Wrightsville Beach, North Carolina*

It landed marvelously  
bad: the wing

and its tip,  
tailfeathers

brightly mangled,  
rib bones

jutting out  
the open belly

like sharpened twigs.  
He puts a hand

on the chest,  
tugs gingerly

at the clenched  
footknot,

inexpertly  
dissembled,

uneaten as yet  
but still

grade-A carcass.  
He tries the car keys

then brute strength,  
tugging firmly

with his foot  
over the body

until,  
in a visitation

of brilliance,  
he takes the shell

of an oyster –  
first and last

of utensils –  
with which he hacks

and *hacks* and *hacks* and *hacks*  
and *hacks*

and pulls away  
two hooked pieces

small  
as hand scythes,

their tendons leaking out  
like knotted hair.

## The Island

Beneath Hag's Head the water rises  
in whitecaps against streaks  
of bird shit and shrimpy mud  
as the island floats into view  
and is gone. For three days  
bad weather. Then one morning  
rainbows off the cliff edge  
like a trick of metallurgy. Wind  
peels bees off the heather,  
squeezes the yew to its whitest sap:  
if I told you that I saw it  
out beyond the ninth wave,  
forked and sloping as the fluke  
of a minke whale and unmoving,  
like an inch of green lichen  
on gray-blue slate, would you say  
I was a coward to stay on land?  
The mist closes as a staggered  
line of puffins needles its pure  
white tunnel through the fog  
and three hundred feet below  
the waves gather their dead  
into a wall, with frescoes of ice.



## The Temple

I have wanted a body that,  
like a cathedral bell,  
could survive several years

with one glowing note  
still resounding beneath  
the skin. I have wanted

a body that, like kudzu,  
would not stop growing.  
The old men at the coffee-

house, nursing tin thermoses  
with wrists now brittle and  
dry: they should be great trees,

warrior-colored oaks gaunt  
as ancient samurai, their hard-  
earned muscle still frightening.

The morning I hiked  
from Tenant Mountain to stand  
barefoot on Shining Rock, I felt

naked. The quartz humming like  
a chapel full of whispers:  
I could have come from

any century. The memory  
of Crete, sitting in the cave  
where Cybel taught Heracles

how to hold a woman's heart –  
slowly, like the song  
of a white crane –

I wanted a body that could sit  
like a growth of quartz,  
sacrificing nerves

for a skin that echoes,  
patiently waiting on  
nothing in particular.

I wanted a body that,  
like Valmiki's, could sit  
nine years in the Himalayas,

ants building their mound  
to the crest of his bald  
head, watching thoughts form

slow as seasons, the  
mountain sweetening his  
insides like a blood

orange until, at last,  
fully ripened by stillness,  
the earth eats him.

## After a Suicide

Taking with you some memory of the crabapples.  
Of London and the cemetery fog. You  
in a corner of the room, looking out  
the bay window with all the nearly-  
blue light on your face. Did you hear it  
when it came, the breath most precious  
for being last? Before it pressed  
slowly out and through the groove  
of the keyhole. Out onto the lawn,  
like a hand of flute music stirring  
the carcass of a bee. Is it so terrible  
finally? Or as they say: all pomegranates  
and ferrymen, the strict bloodless moon  
each day on the underground lake,  
afterlife in the darkness of tubers.  
Are you cracking jokes now  
on your sad long way to Mt. Katahdin?  
But perhaps you are born already,  
a gloved hand pulling you out  
fresh and sinewed as a newly-bit  
nectarine, your pink butt smacked  
hard as all the air and death bends  
into a boy. What is there left to do now  
but thank you. Thank you for ever  
giving me to you. Thank you for dying on time.

## Reconstruction

*“But, my dear sirs, when peace does come, you may call on me for any thing. Then will I share with you the last cracker.”*

(General Sherman , “Letter to Atlanta”)

They put their guns in the only boxes  
that they had, and those the well-  
liquored strips of gin barrels  
wrapped in hemp, and buried them  
in the troughs of their once-fields  
of burnt clay. The black went down  
six feet, so they said,  
until one of the shovels struck  
a hemp-root, *the last root*  
*in Georgia*, and threw them in  
while reciting from a Bible  
something around the Canaanites,  
and thought about the barrels rusting  
in their musty barrelwoods. Everyone  
could play the fiddle, but those were gone  
with the woodwinds – so they sat  
one by one and talked about  
the acrid earth in their mouths  
like burnt bread as one hums  
a negro song, and the others,  
finding they can speak the words  
begin to sing, loudly, howling,  
until one says, *shit son*  
*you'd think we're trying to call them back.*

Ephesus

*"And not a few of them that practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all; and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver."*

(Acts 19:19)

The price of oranges had gone up  
so I brought a pitcher of turnips.

I arranged them for days at the foot of the statue.

By the time I was done they were rotten,  
with small bugs crawling on the paper.

I powdered the shells of the oyster with my feet.

I belched the bell gong and sat with the ants.  
It appeared appropriate to leave some blood,

so I cut a beet when no one was looking.

Later, a cardinal flew in from the hole.  
She landed on a breast and asked, *Which statement is truer?*

*I was lost.*

*I was lost, and then I was lost.*

*I could not sleep for not having found.*

*The thing I hadn't found was you.*

By now I am an old man, but death is no nearer.

When I see him coming, he crosses  
to the other side of the street.

I invite him to my soirées and he replies

*honeymooning in Palm Springs.*

I believe him, because of the retirees in Palm Springs.

Alone, I carry my pitcher of turnips again.

I knock three times before entering.

The priests have come and pounded off her breasts with iron crucifixes.

I feel for a nipple in the dirt.

## The Road

*after Cavafy*

The latest on the road from nowhere is your going  
and coming out the end of it, somewhere near Ithaka.  
Cavafy said, do not seek riches in Ithaka, for once  
you get there, Ithaka will only be Ithaka, and you  
will be the man who went on the road to Ithaka,  
who survived his own desire for Ithaka, and found himself  
at the other end of desire, still alive, somehow,  
and capable of making the little fog breaths.  
I wanted Ithaka and its Cyclops, on the road. I wanted,  
somehow, to be defeated by the road. Instead I am the road  
defeating the Cyclops and Ithaka, defeating most noble  
desire itself. Alone with this wanting nothing but the road.

Alexandria Duet

*“Beyond the canal there still remains a small part of the city. Then follows the suburb  
Necropolis, in which are numerous gardens, burial-places, and buildings for carrying on the  
process of embalming the dead.”*

*(Strabo, Geographia XVII 1)*

I. Antony

To him the city casts human shadows,  
the walls like a mosaic of arms and legs  
in their circular motions, a plaster orgy  
with each suffocating pleasure laid  
stone by stone. It breathes: the city  
and its shadow, like a winepress of bodies  
beneath the circling Levant.

*What use Empire  
to the body's known world?*

The streets folded, dropped  
into the sea like dark coins  
over a balcony as a prostitute  
sings to herself in the street below,  
lifts her voice to reach across  
to the land of the dead, out beyond  
the memory of torchfires over the water,

and for one long moment he forgets  
the noise of Caesar's road  
pounding the harbor wall,



looks across the room  
at his own reflection in the glass –  
lips half-curved: the face of a man  
after eating the first lotus,

and falls asleep with his body floating over  
the colored banners, over the windows  
breathing into each other's mouth –  
and the perfume of each door was half skin.

*"The New Moon rose over Alexandria  
holding the old one in her arms"*

(George Seferis)

Away, the Damascus bell breaks  
in the city's throat, hard as a lemon,  
as each boat's reflection on the air  
turns and departs for the other sea.

\* \* \* \* \*

The god abandoned Antony twice.  
First in the mild perfume of ankle shells,  
the groin-warmed tambourines  
spun in the air like silver bowls

sifting hairs of wheat.

And a second time  
more slow, like the bulge of his face  
on each mercury-colored denar  
passed over stalls of amber and brocade,  
dropped with the sound of running water

on a boat's tilting floor:

each thousand-  
handed minute palming his features  
to oblivion. Like that the god spent

and spent,  
and never returned.

Meanwhile Antony  
                                  in bed, dreams  
of water slipping over a river stone,  
fingering smooth each porous line  
like a tiny thread of bone  
until the rock begins to move.

## 2. Cavafy

In his alcove the Alexandrian  
slim, mustached, pours  
chalk from a silk bag into a glass,  
watches the light-dissolving flare

of the city's granules like mullein dust  
in the glass bottom of his mind.  
In it one person crosses a screen, meets  
another like blue-fibered ghosts

in pipesmoke. One speaks: you can see  
the mouth moving, and the other  
grows imperceptibly more heavy,  
like a palm frond in no air. They gesture

and slow, then one forgets (the other  
forgotten) and new figures swirl  
onto the screen of his mind  
as the city goes on rehearsing.

\* \* \* \* \*

*In the darkness of apples.  
In the rooms with walls of ochre daylight*

*where the last drop in the left-out cups  
hardens to shadow,*

*and the white dress hung on the line  
is used to wrap day-old meat.*

What he has left to say is windows,  
bottles, a bulb going on

or out: the spare ingredients  
of the city

dissolved,  
worn thought-thin, mindful

of the slow progress of bird shadows,  
the folded echo of a dropped dime.

And the occasional tremble  
(attributed to a train

or car, which barely dips  
its finger in your tea)

flutters the back wall of the pantry  
like a saucer turned into a moth,

and is also felt by other cities:  
the seismic palpitations

of the dead scraping their heels  
on the river's glass – from one

dead city to another, from one  
live city comparing dead,

whose each green-tinged elevator wire  
circles with dead like dust.

Now he drinks from the river  
that runs through both cities

(the living and the dead) falling off the edge  
of one in brownish strings.

Falling down through time or up,  
catching on the air

that dresses each water like a glove  
where he drinks the city from his hands.

Ars Poetica

*“the Poet working with the knife  
in his third hand...”*

(Odysseas Elytis)

I pull the hand out of my pocket,  
the vanishing hand.  
I am glad that it is only air.  
Soon I will be able to see through it  
to your face  
when I hold it over my face.  
The keys I was using  
will fall and land with a bright noise  
in the emptying hall: lucky hand,  
never again having to unlock  
anything. Unable to carry without dropping  
the visible.  
Pulling no weeds with the taste of wet dirt.  
Now it will gather what it learned  
in sleep to gather: the transparent,  
that which grows inside  
the chamberous shadow of the seen:  
like the strings of birds,  
or the indentions your pain makes  
on the air. Faulty hand,  
I will try to tie a knot  
of invisible herbs  
and fail, until it learns  
how to build, how to take down.

A Sound Eye

The last of simplicities: that your white arm  
could up and vanish and still be here

in the room, attached to the same body.  
The sound of the gramophone

rattling its table is louder than  
the sound that eventually croaks out

its sock-muted mouth. You are going blind.  
The rods and cones that made

*The Favorite of the Emir*  
along the inside of your eyelids

bleach with effort. Now they're saying  
there is strength for one last

good image: what will you choose?  
And when it goes,

leaving behind the invisible –  
that which you were already

privileged to see –  
and the world goes on

adjusting a touchable curtain  
or moon somewhere just

out of reach. Will you still watch  
as the window-holding wall

disappears and reappears,  
and is wanted each time.

Ellipsoidal

A second light source turns on  
somewhere in the room, perhaps  
in the small of your neck

and the glistening black curls  
reflecting other lights: sundown  
like burning resins, like feathers

lit on the outer hairs. It wasn't  
him, or another him, or behind  
the bright vault of our conversation,

but like a window opened  
somewhere, in the bottom of your glass, lit  
and lighting, a hidden room, a hidden star.

Salt

Do you remember the rain on the windows in that particular street  
in Provence? Is that motor and deluge any different  
than it was then? The stars and the warmness under them  
where I sat with my feet on the porous rock, carving  
a flute from the fibia of an elk, giving up half-way in,  
calling it a dart blower for the children. What children?  
Every once in a while I take it down from the wall  
and shoot my big toe. Such delight, each time.



## Flamenco

His brown hand over the guitar. A brown leather hand  
opening and closing. *It is called flamenco.* I know flamenco,

having met him in a cave outside Granada. Flamenco has no running water.  
He starts his laptop with a generator. Like Ginsberg, flamenco receives

on average fifteen letters a day. He reads them all.  
To write a letter to flamenco, you must find a cactus with a dead bird

on it. You must burn the cactus and eat the bird so that later, lying  
face up on the dune, in the company of rattlesnakes and sylphs,

you will not get hungry and scare off your desire.  
Flamenco does not believe in housekeeping. Flamenco

ill let you wash the dirt off your own feet with water and lemon.  
If you ask to see the daughters, flamenco will pull out his collection of poisonous beetles.

Flamenco will not give you things to say to the mailman.  
You must think of your own things to say to the mailman.

If you are old, flamenco will help you cross the road,  
but you will not know what road or which country.

Flamenco can show you how to find self-portraits of famous photographers  
beneath the stacks of girly mags in the outdoor market of Guadalajara.

When you die, flamenco will be there to ferry you across the big water,  
but only if you bring him a bag of Ho Ho's.

According to flamenco, there are two ways of putting Tabasco  
on your *patatas bravas*: not at all, and not at all.

At night it is possible to see flamenco from outer space,  
but only if he is wearing his green sombrero.

When flamenco is wearing his green sombrero, it is best to not see flamenco at all, but instead to close your eyes

and keep thinking of flamenco as you remember him: old, tired, dead, young, vigorous, and almost certainly not wearing a green sombrero.

My reason for remaining

on the island was the food  
but also the more  
and more world that arrived

every time the sun set  
and another mound of surf  
appeared with the tide.

There were hundreds,  
and for each one  
another species of silence

that bulged in the dark  
like clams achingly white  
beneath rooms of saltwater.

At night the lone beach house  
with the Malibu-blue roof  
and matching gazebo

flickers TV like a ghostly  
lighthouse and I imagine  
herds of African gazelle

each day over the green hills  
on the screen and warm grass  
with their shadows like the shadows

of tiny deer at sunset  
as they cut a straight path  
through the waves and go out.

## Last City

Perhaps it is the matter of going out  
which bothers me. That you or I  
  
or someone we know will have to get up,  
wearing only the warmth of the memory  
  
of our clothes, and find an airy socket  
in the car-fumed street. They say  
  
it is possible, for those who go quickly  
or who are born with only one soul  
  
to slip out with dignity, from the back row  
at an opera, and into a black cab  
  
with plush seats and tinted windows full  
of aquarium lights. But what about  
  
the rest – the underdressed millions  
forced to rise and leave with the curtain  
  
still up, and the sound of someone's voice  
lingering on the air. Do they file  
  
one by one into the street, leaving behind  
a pair of gloves or a half-touched  
  
glass of wine, waiting for no one to arrive  
and offer to pay the fare? But then  
  
who's to say that you and I, busy making  
small talk with someone or another  
  
on the last sidewalk, couldn't manage  
to find a road of our own, and a ride.