

## TIM NOLAN

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### Doors and Windows

These habits of unlatching, unlocking, turning  
the porcelain knob, lifting the squeaky sash, pulling  
the past gently behind you to seal it off in the room,

raising the clackety blinds to look out through all your eyes,  
listening for the slam of the car door out on the street,  
pushing the electric button, feeling the full wind,

lapping the air like water rushing by on the highway,  
being a retriever of the hello and goodbye, accomplishing  
these constant daily transformations, crossing

the threshold again and again, coming in and going out,  
until you become—*all threshold*—your face being the site  
of all the thresholds you've crossed, into all the rooms,

out of all the houses, with that surprise, weariness, that leap  
of love, the turning of the key, the leaning on the sill,  
the dancing on the threshold, the door in your arms.

## Do You Know What I Mean?

As you wake up—all the little nothings  
are released from your dream

like a flock of monarchs—they  
hardly bend the blades of grass—

and—the mongrel armies gather forces—  
as you bathe and shave—your nose

broadens—and your eyes—*oh*—what  
tender shock in seeing them again.

How did you select this costume  
of your body from all the possibilities?

And each gathering moment presents  
a question you would like to avoid.

I know you know what I mean—  
this lightness of the self—this

transparent veil—it covers your face  
in sorrow or in joy—sometimes—

in those brief moments—  
you understand all the lively accidents.

## English

I love this knock-about tongue, its  
hard consonants and cracks, its  
noble vowels, its mothering of empty space.

I love the way that English works  
on the seashore among the crabs and  
green vowels, the way it bakes bread

with vigor and pounds stones  
with venom. Its venial and cardinal sins,  
its fucking and sucking, its mewling,

all the syllabic sense, its birdwalk  
and catwalk and small talk, its feisty  
short vowels and long sane vowels,

its mister and mistress. I love speaking  
in it and I love lounging in the gutter of it.  
The sea of it. The sea of it washing

the edge of the page. And its drowsy languor,  
the fall to love of it, the seeping excess. The down  
to nothing if it. The *empire* of its sounds.

## Memory Too

When you get to be a certain age, anticipation relaxes  
and you sense the past as a long-tailed comet and you

(your face like a fat snowball) the flaring trajectory  
at the head of it, with deep space out in front of you.

Then, sometimes, pausing over the puzzle, you realize  
your mother's maiden name is odd—*Leadon*—weighted down,

yet somehow free—depending on your pronunciation.  
And once in awhile, a whole scene comes back—

a quiet room, the afternoon light, then a slow-moving cello,  
tapping its way on the stairs, taking its long breaths at each  
landing.

Of course, you always rearrange the sequence of events  
to place yourself at the very center, always getting in the last word,

rising from your chair to speak the final paragraphs of *The Great Gats*  
Even embarrassment, even despair take on that nostalgia of the scar—

that accommodation on the surface of the skin. And your body  
becomes an easy suit, made of that durable and yet-to-be

discovered fabric that changes color and texture, expands  
and recedes—not at your command—but somehow—of your willing.

## My First Poems

Were written on the backs  
of sad check stubs—in the

MEN's room at work—West  
57th Street—New York City—

in the days when you could  
smoke—everywhere—and had

every occasion to smoke—  
and everyone was about to be—

*someone*—I would be—*T. Nolan*  
that one-eyed poet—who wrote—

short lines—almost Greek—  
*leftovers*—like Sappho—they

spoke—in an absence of—  
speaking—they were oddly—

*enjambéd*—in a way no one  
had ever enjambéd such things—

then—when I was done with  
my—*efforts*—done smoking—

done with my—*bodily needs*—  
I folded my—*masterpiece*—

into that tight wad—with all  
the other sad check stubs—

in my wallet—which was full  
of other sad stubs of days—

like stubbed cigarettes—then—  
I understood—the words came to—

*nothing*—and—I was silent—  
for a long time—*smoking*—

carrying—*Check Stub Poems*—  
a whole book of them—my own—

*Harmonium*—my own—*Self-Portrait  
in a Convex Mirror*—unfolding them

like crumpled—*origami swans*—  
still—*floating*—with music—*I heard*—

## Wonder

What will they make of us in the future  
when they sift through our debris, when they  
apply their speculative minds to us?

Will they think—"I've found the key to the lexicon  
in this *Chock Full O' Nuts coffee can*." Or—  
"Rituals were conducted at *Airports* facing southwest."

Will they imagine our royal processions in wooden cars  
across *I-80* in Nebraska? Will they search  
for a *Ford Fairlaine*, having found the repair book?

Surely they will find our bones and skulls—no  
surprises there. But how will they understand that  
8-track tape of *Blood, Sweat & Tears*, how

to hear that voice, the jabbing brass section, wind  
rushing past with the highway rushing past, that  
deep sense of freedom? Maybe the TV, radio, and micro

waves will bounce forever between canyon walls  
in Syria—waiting to be caught by a *sensitive device*.  
Maybe our heartbeats will be monitored remotely

eons later—had we lived this is how our hearts  
would sound—that old song of the heartbeat—  
pitched to the inner ear—and—coincident with the moon.

## The Journey

I would like to surprise you  
with some sleight-of-hand—some  
turn of phrase—some transformation

that would be some—*as if*—some  
hypothetical—that you wouldn't believe  
at first—but all at once—

the words would convince you  
to sell your clothes—throw away  
your sad shoes—wear that

saffron gown—make some small music  
with those finger bells—hit the road—  
the road—which has been there all along.