

FINAL LESSON IN FIRST PHILOSOPHY

DAN BEACHY-QUICK

The sun brightens the clouds before it breaks
them apart. On the far side of the ocean
there are marble ruins of the broken
temples: the temple each cloud is. Ruin
is faith's consequence—to house the force
that tears the house apart. The sun is
the yellow shield buckled on to the throat
of the sun-throated warbler—it says
with no words song's unspeakable fact.
Silence is faith's consequence—a world of
knowing that knowing is a world of not.
The book called *The Sun* held a fact one could love
but have no faith in. Close the book. Think,
thinker, in the dark. Moon—quiet the lark.

CANTO VIII

DAN BEACHY-QUICK

The many sighs about the single gate
 speak a knowledge that does not know
 itself, that nothing grows in the gathering
 place, half-gloom, dark woods,
travelers' feet trample the tendrils, asking
to hear again the answer to their question—

but it's the question that's misunderstood.
 Who is it that keeps my eyes
 covered by his sleeve, so I cannot see
 who speaks to us both?
If you listen and do no more than listen, then
you will not be turned to stone. But if you see—

sparks will catch flame, flames will catch form,
 and the forms will speak to you
 of why it is the sky is blue: the white clouds,
 or the gray, are by the wind
blown away. *Blew-en* cognate with *Blewe*.
The blown sky is blue sky. The same wind blows

the chaff from the mind whose thinking winnows
 thought's husk from the seed.
 The same wind shakes the willow like a rattle.
 How guess, if you did not know,
weeping fills the heart with longing and does not
empty it? Imagine the sea and stare out

as if your mother might walk out the deep
 and hold you again to her breast,
 comfort, calm, promise with upturned palm
 she'll intercede even with the gods

for you, her son. Imagine it and you're holding even now
in your hand broken shells of oysters and clams.

'Omeros . . . 'O-meros . . . 'O-mer-os . . .
 The scent of the sea blows under the pines.
 Waves that are the bones of galloping mares.
 Waves that dig a cave in cliff stone.
Sea that sleeps in a cave. The blind poet opens
his mouth and asks who? 'O-mer-os . . . 'O-meros . . .

Far off, deep in the woods, a dog howls.
 A leopard rumor prowls
 the forest to keep those lost there lost
 among the voices no mouth
speaks. Dark woulds of the middle voice—
dark woulds of the middle life.

My child broke a branch from an oak tree
 called it a sword, killed
 her monster, and left it on the porch.
 I painted the branch gold
and started walking through the world—
no monsters, some voices, I'm a door growing old.

CANTO XXI

DAN BEACHY-QUICK

my fragment acted like a living fragment

an eye that sees the other eye can't see] an I
that says I think] as the law of the oak is the leaf] I see
the star-knot is the study of the missing thing] study of
October days when the little blindness grows] in eyes
my own and other than my own] my own darkness
isn't what can't be seen] ask the acorns and ask
the oats] whether to have breath or to breathe] the absolute
delicacy of the present tense] the folded light
in the corner of the eye unfolds like] like
likeness exists] bright tangle of clean sheet shaken out
above the bed settles gently down] a little blindness
made of such light] dove-down and owl-down and
eider-down too fall slower than the early snow
filling the broken aviary] of the open hand
that is the mind's lonely gesture] it's true isn't it
true?] oblivion is the bird that nests in the palm
of the hand and sings no song] nothing's fragment
that acts like it's alive] like the intricate lacework
of light between leaves looking up from underneath
the maze of the tree] like the lacewings exist
in another dimension] frost works its fragile architecture
behind my eye where winter forgets the logic
of its form] the new wish wants to quit memory
and find a mother who will teach this voice to talk
differently than now it talks] like the leaves are eyes
and eyes are leaves] like the hand is also a leaf] like
the mind doesn't mind not knowing the names are
nothing but] like *sees* rhymes with *seize* and *seas*]
those bright vessels filled with blind light

SYNTAX

DAN BEACHY-QUICK

Grows more ornate (yes, it does, yes, it does)
as memory loses hold, creates braids
convoluted, a grammar convulses
around the clear photon of one bright word
as memory gathers inside it (yes,
it does) its oblivion, our Mother
Oblivion, all along, it's true, says
the mouth, they all belong to another,
these songs my face gathered around to sing—
a kind of cloth (yes), what does it mean,
does it mean, (it does) the needle in the sewing
machine, the mouth full of threads, to see
an image in the mind's machine, but no
words, no shroud—a worm at root of the rose.