

Five Poems

Mark Anthony Cayanan

S e l f - portrait with intrusion

He feels almost new again
when before him is a door and
it leads to the bathroom.

And there is a strange light
only because the door is glossy
and reflects the laundry sign outside.

He huddles under the shower,
looks at the downpool
of water. Water

cleans; it cleans just so.
Nothing in its disappearance
speaks to or about his life. Hope

has sloughed off flakes of him, but not
only because
he thinks but does not think this

through, enough.
He stymies his breathing and waits for
what he knows won't

come. But when he has to try
again: always there is never much
about the world reveals

him, anything else and new.

S e l f - portrait with minutiae

Color of pause, of what now,
color of wind, wind
dropping on the table
a sullen thud. Stain

of a mouth on another's pillow:
to the night
add years, keep at it,
add impatience. Stain

on a shirt, hours drying
at the bottom
of a hamper, and then
the crisp consternation.

It's pulled off a self, held
against a body,
taken upon himself.
It is here and will

multiply. Plucks it off the soft,
lays it on his palm,
unmakes it his.
Color of the lie

just spoken. He crawls
 into its filaments
and rearranges the furniture:
 a daybed by the window,

hammock, rocking chair, dusk, and
 everything after.
Color of a plane's interior,
 the space between a thigh

and the leatherette.
 Into a self he desiccates
and it meets, as each one does,
 the same end.

To refuse the face in the mirror:
 color of Karen Carpenter,
color of November.
 The certainty of it

scalpels into everyday moving
 forward. Color of
sad sack, color of a mother of six.
 They scissor her blouse

off her breast and see
the wrong of her hide.
Color of his father,
color his friends lose to,

color of a prophet's gullet,
the neighbor's early-morning
tirade, the discreet
belch after the third bottle.

Sets it against the sink
and it sneers into
its question. Questions it
and it shrugs its shoulders.

Has no spine, it will
like a vise rivet him
like a verdict, is almost
nothing yet, yet

S e l f - portrait without duration

Time as ever grants sleep through
its mouth. How he shall keep turning to it.

How he needs to never know me, grows into
what we are made of. Outside

the street outside happens: lights when seen
as window flap like torn-loose skin:

when place softens he accepts this affection.
Every tiny sun weakens. With her breast
his body too.

When the mother ministers, her back
is speckled with annulments. The preloved mobile

overhead foists upon forms
forms. At which point does the world go

from mere fact to that which you can't but obey.
Dear God let it not be just yet:

The ceiling now again a rumor of stars,
the blanket another evening gifted. It bolts out into itself.

A line of cars taillights across the wall onto
his wrist and from which it concerts
his fist: the stammering arrivals of

every night. May my dying's punctual hour
be a reprieve from this body, claimed by his newness.

S e l f - portrait with no eye on the prize

When I say I have a wide net of nothing in me
do something I would
spend time understanding.

Be turned to me
and given. I've thought myself out of
what to say and therefore over you I

wait. I'm ashamed that I am ashamed
and therefore now
disclose what you might have without myself had.

I expect mercy. I believe in other things, but why
should I tell you that? I can lie in this refusal

everyday, my body dissuaded into
obedience every time the shadow of your wings
moves over my face
like the great narrative of conquest.

And even then how I feel is from the words
I choose. Even then sadness is a place I've grown
tired of leaving. Which means I'm not

and that why I often enough regret and
what about and whomever for
cause me
shame. The blinds of this dark, the bed in which
my life is lived out, the life I want owned
is a placeholder. How in the opposite

room where nothing has stacked his envies
I listen to someone say you

have at last learned to covet only
what is offered in earnest, but how can I not be

not hopeful enough not to give a shit?
I have tried.

And that I wish to be found out
makes it something I only talk through and must need.

Self - portrait as sadness as pleasure

My migraine is an invective I echo my soul out of. It bounces off the side of the mountain and tells me I'm the shit-shit-shit.

I am usually if not always self-deprecating. I must say I am writing this with a migraine. That I've said it means your claims for me are better than mine for myself. I make no claims for myself; I make concessions.

To say I am writing this with a migraine feels as trite as desperation.

Some days I can feel my migraine crawling out of an alcove in my right temple. It wants its secrets cleansed and so says the required prayers, and says them, and says them.

I name my migraine _____, for my best ex. My best sex is never with an ex. This I feel the need to be asked about. I am writing this down so I am asked about it.

It migraine, I say. Look at the sky for troubled clouds.

My migraine likes to snack; he keeps packets of garlic peanuts in his backpack. In the right-hand pocket of his slacks he used to bring with him three chocolate bars, a tub of popcorn, a liter of diet Coke, the resolve to snap out of what he's always been, a couple of breath mints.

Some days I tell my friends I have a migraine, when, really, I've only taken a bunch of Benadryls and decided to sleep off the whole day. There is comfort in knowing that the lie, barely disguised, is forgiven.

I ask my migraine what he wants, and he says I want a life. He means, I want out of you.

My migraine has a great sense of direction. He can sniff out the nearest allergen and unswervingly direct me to it. He remembers how to get there the next time.

Like a bird my migraine migraines to warm regions.

I don't get migraines when I am in love. What I get are valid reasons to not see you tonight.

Once after a month of being out of the city, my migraine sends me a postcard of an ancient revolver encased in glass. At the back he writes, I feel like a cock. The hours I keep I keep away from you.

When I am in bed and it is noon and my curtains shut out the light, I like to listen to music—volume turned down and down—to make me think life happens alongside mine. I've been the same song for four years.

I am bored with my feelings. I know no other narrative aside from my own migraine.

The month my migraine got nearly intolerable was the month I discovered white hair down there.

In the bathroom of my recurrent nightmare I peek into a hole and my migraine pokes me in the eye.

My migraine is a map of something that should be important. I open him up and he spits in my face, refusing to provide answers. My migraine is a map with a mouth. Half his teeth are missing. The rest have yet to break through his gum.

My migraine comes up to me to ask where the market is. I tell him I'm also a tourist, and next thing I know I'm giving him hickeys while we're on the top bunk of his room.

I talk a lot about it because, you know, I'm as deprived as an adolescent. I'm paranoid about catching a migraine. You can, of course, change my mind and tell me I can trust you.

My migraine hates children. This is why we will only ever have dogs. I am telling a lie. I will only ever die alone.

Stop answering in another language, I snap at my migraine. It's been a bad day, and I refuse to be deprived of the option to condescend.

Is this what we are now, I ask my migraine. Black-shirted and placard-wielding, he whispers, Why, through the indignation, do you insist on the same questions.

You whom I must convince, who are you to nod politely to what I want to mean? Take whatever I say with a migraine of salt. I want you

to understand me in spite of myself, is how I hate myself during days I remember I must.

Stay still, my migraine says, and he slaps my cheek with his tumescent unhappiness. As present as a god, it's as uneventful as a threat.