

The Multitude



Endor (Disambiguation)

In a hut in the Star Wars universe,
on the forest moon of Endor,
a creature carefully draws a map
of things connected to other things.

The creature draws a road between
two worlds, because one Elvish name
for Tolkien's Middle-earth is also
this forest moon or the planet
the forest moon orbits—
on this point the Star Wars universe is unclear.

Maybe our universe has a finite number
of times you can summon the dead
so we've begun to repeat ourselves.

Endor, ancient Canaanite village,
home of the witch who conjured Samuel.
Endor, Palestinian village,
depopulated. Endor, Israeli kibbutz.
Endor, the most successful town
in *Dragon Quest IV: Chapters of the Chosen*.

So who can blame the Israelite king
for wanting his best prophet
back from the land of the dead?

Who can blame the witch,
who only did what was asked of her?
Endor, forest moon, home place.

There were so many worlds
I longed to visit as a child,
where the creatures, the citizens,
would line up along the street
to say, *Welcome friend, welcome stranger*.

Burlington Northern Apocalypse

Burlington, Washington

It's that time of night, pilgrim, you know
the one I mean, when heartache wails through town
and all the dogs and ghosts sit up
then lie back down, sighing, *no, not this time.*

It wakes you like the call to prayer you first heard
years ago, unfurled from half-a-dozen minarets
in a blue city, and when those voices shook the floor,
you heard quite plainly, *God is great,*

what are you doing here? So you came home, rode
line after creaking line until some boxcar
dumped you in this cloud-swamped scrap of a town
swept so clean by God's broom

all that's left is a shuttered hardware store
and the diminished chord that rides the Doppler down
then slinks away to die in a rusted-out railyard.
If, in this moment, you can still believe

the voice that rouses you is still the voice
that called you back from somewhere east
to these souls you left for dead years ago,
then follow this: a single line for your single

mind, a prayer that rumbles north-northwest,
past dead boxcars, the graveyard, flooded fields,
dikes, migrant camps, moss-ruined barracks, past
land stuttering into marsh and island, past coast

after coast until the curtain of mist rises
and all that's left is water, air, and whatever's
out there—admit you don't know, admit it—
dark, plain, quiet, bottomless, and cold.

To the Body Carried Out of the Apartment Across the Street

Sometimes I pretend I don't live anywhere
real, at least not here, the Ballard-Interbay Industrial Area
a dented sign welcomes us to. You must have
tried this, too: closing your eyes, making the incessant hum
of cars on pavement sound like waves on the beach,
the way when you're a kid your mother tells you
to hold the shell to your ear to hear the ocean.

After they rolled you out in the blank zipped-up bag
and the medical examiner's van pulled away,
traffic stopped slowing down. I went indoors,
and so did the neighbors, divorced dad and ex-frat boy.
Whatever happened to you, it worked.

But you should know: the sun rises earlier and earlier now.
The crocuses next to the dumpster are opening
their fat purple mouths. The mail continues to arrive
on time; the recycling is still emptied every Thursday,
and when the glass bottles shatter, I plug my ears
and wonder what sound could wake you, and what color
is the blankness that your blank eyes see.

Street Fighter II for a Broken Sega Genesis

Our hands remember the feint and jab
but nothing works the way it used to.

Brought forth from tangled wires—the battles
we thought we'd abandoned, sloughed off as we grew,

but couldn't bear to throw away.
So there they are, in the 10-foot storage unit,

in the back aisle at the Goodwill, in a yard sale bin,
or in the same air-conditioned basements where we spent

all summer in combat to what circular purpose—to defeat
each other in endless knockout rounds.

So the heat comes back to our blood.
Most of the buttons do nothing, but you've found

a way to swipe my feet from under me—
your lone trick move, no matter what guise

you assume. Bodies remember: blow on the cartridge;
bang on the console when the picture freezes.

And though I jump in one direction only,
no longer master of the lightning kick, simplicity

makes our quarrel beautiful. My adversary, my beloved,
fight me, fight on with your one good claw.

Chess by Mail

I write this for you, who will never read it.
You're standing at a window
overlooking a lower level of the afterlife,
rows of card catalogs and microfiche machines,
academic journals with spines uncracked—
the memory apparatus we don't use
anymore. Do you remember the game
we played in another life? The life of aerograms
and twenty-five-cent stamps, when index cards
held gambits, codes, verses, binomials.
You let me rearrange the pieces,
not by how they're meant to move
because (you said) the queen
moves any direction. I am not the queen.
I do not move any direction
but west, but forward in time
to your library as you left it, the weighted pieces
high on their shelf. In this life,
your commonplace books line bottom shelves,
pasted with postcards, poems, editorials, old news.
If I reassembled them would it re-
assemble you? No? Pawn to queen four.