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# The Rapid Unexpected

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The Rapid Unexpected

by

Daniel Pantano

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts  
Department of English  
College of Arts and Sciences  
University of South Florida

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Dedication

For Fiona Katharina and Giacomo Daniele—*You are what I cannot write*

## Acknowledgements

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# The Rapid Unexpected

Daniel Pantano

## ABSTRACT

These lyric poems were written between August 2003 and June 2005 and bear witness to the human condition in all its facets, from birth and the first taste of lemon ice to exile and suicide. Within a landscape that encompasses many locales, the poems included here attempt to portray the particular to denote the universal and are always confronted by the ineffable connection between the two.

Innumerable poems projected in rapid succession create the illusion of a narrative. Every poem, however, is enveloped by bursts of whiteness: the mystery of breath and revelation.

## STRANGER

I first saw her in the mirror of the burnt hall  
Her white hair spreading across Europe

## STREETS THAT END IN YOUR NAME

*A city will not remember your name  
unless you find it in her streets.*

But youth unearths  
its names as pages  
torn from a banned text:  
a scrapbook of stains.

*We cannot allow this city to ignore us.*

We piss our names  
on the wall of the cathedral.  
Watch how every letter  
seeps through history.

*When the night seizes its wounds  
no one is a stranger.*

Beneath the onerous arch,  
we scorch our maps.  
Sow ashes for the Lost.  
All the Lost.

*Everything is real; nothing can be stolen.*

Our legless voices snap  
an unknown poet's lines.  
A bough broken  
across worn doorways.

*Have you been hurt?  
Come and take a close look.*

Climb the highest walls.  
Sit. Drink another bottle.  
Toss it. See it fall.  
Howl as it shatters.

EVERY MOMENT OCCURS AFTER  
A SEQUENCE OF LOOKS

anticipate the whipping beauty of Aztec women  
accustomed to euphoria within the word

inform the reader he's unable to solicit the final embalming

language consists of minute fractures beneath every climax

confirm the impossible: to fully comprehend any experience  
we can die instantly and laugh about it

proclaim days are dominated by sex, verbs, red paint

witness the death of a praying mantis  
as brown women finally tremble

SPADAFORA, SICILY

Upon crossing the crowded promenade of a Sicilian fishing village  
one experiences the metamorphosis of a neighborhood

with its colonies of wild, black-haired women

its faded architecture gutted by salt

its voices shepherded by wine and lava

its parameter stretching towards mountain orchards

and its aroma of religious perspiration, infernal passion

and ancient gastronomy

by blessing the dormant boats

and delicately pushing the sun beyond the dynamics of the sea

TABLE #8

Splinters of thoughts  
seem indecent.

Paddling, staggering back.  
His gaze stitched onto her dress.

He finishes dinner  
and remains, evermore  
feeling comfortably fascinated.

FALLEN

My grape harvest appeared meaningless.

Until, among the vineyard's knotty ruins  
I found her phosphorescent skin, her mind  
buttressed by November's gelid veins.

To her intent, I knew my thirst  
was immutably bound. So I crushed her body  
with the phallic weight of August

trousers unbuttoned, skirts raised by gypsy hymns,  
objects most necessary to the hour of my birth,  
to douse my lips with her caustic sap.

Every grape reveals a different poison.  
Every woman stems from a different grape.

## FUGUE

night harvests her scent

.  
unfurled limbs:

the calligraphy of seduction

.  
nomads whisper sixty-nine borders

.  
dermal concord

.  
every crossing a pant of energy

.  
every penetration a lacuna of refuge

AND THE CORRESPONDENCE  
AMONG OURSELVES

remains anonymous

we are not bothered by the faces  
of frayed women who escaped  
the washed milieu:  
mustaches and aftershave

we are not bothered by the smell of oranges

only the taciturn call of dusty furniture  
and life's murder in silver frames  
tighten our chains

for ghosts have a facile way  
of penetrating our soul's cracked mortar

they rest within  
inflict a tender instant  
and exit

only to return unannounced  
over and over and over

## PEDIGREED HANDS

The old Sicilian recalls American soldiers  
who traded cigarettes for wine and tomatoes

Baby-faced freedom fighters  
who trafficked their way into heritage

tasted their fathers' burnt land  
quenched mothers' heat of poverty

touched lives with pedigreed hands

unlike their British counterparts  
who abandoned their promises

once the tomatoes were eaten  
and the bottles of wine emptied

## VALKYRIE THIGHS

Everything becomes nuclear . . .crystallized . . .faceted  
The impact catapults me out of the seat  
and onto a mountain of Valkyrie thighs—I'm home again

In the distance, ravens feast on schoolbooks and suburban girls  
They cannot run anymore  
Listen to the old house speak gently to its insolent dogs

Here, restrictions are incomprehensible  
Notebooks are currency  
Who can say the least earns the newest fashions

We eat tomatoes before they are green

## THE OLDEST HANDS IN THE WORLD

On this chair, as I am every morning, waiting  
for the cappuccino and *briosch* to arrive,

and the girl with the oldest hands in the world,  
I sense exile is a city reared by eternal artifice.

All sweet violence and thought and repetition.

Beyond what history has left of this topography,  
the cup is whiteness, the coffee brown semen.

My first sip makes her appear with provender  
and sandals from behind the insignificant ruins.

But for the time being, ruins are eucalyptus trees.  
And she not a girl on her way to feed chickens

but a face concealed by dripping nets. Dressed  
in black sails and hair dyed a Roman blonde.

The lips of her soul are burning sages, I know.  
Her name, I don't. Only her hands matter.

Laden with broached scars they remind me—  
home is where children sprout in rippled soil.

Where footsteps are mosaics of possibility.

To go on. Finish breakfast. Read the line  
that ends in God's breath. Again.

CICADAS IN THE VALLEY OF TEMPLES

*for L. Pirandello*

Offer the Akragantine men an origin of movement  
a nexus with the glorious temples which filter modernity

## FOREIGN POLICY

The Sicilian theatre erupted with laughter  
as the attractive American woman  
requested a cappuccino after dinner

In response she rose to pierce  
the gallery of blood oranges  
with her Italian-made stilettos

WHEN SIGHT BECOMES UNBEARABLE,  
SPRING 1945

Miles outside the camp, the very last  
cattle car stood yet to be discovered.

In it, men, women, and children,  
who had torn each other's eyes out,  
  
sat with open wrists, listening.

To what?

Blood drying as tears  
on unblemished skin.

Barred shafts of light  
unhinging gates.

A heartbeat. Its decrescendo  
to the coda's final note:

when sight becomes unbearable,

the voice of darkness is the hope  
in every mother's womb.

EINE KLEINE NACHTMUSIK

My infant son is the moon.  
His face with the crescent smile.

Sleep's music renders us equal.

Soon, we shall dance  
in the morning  
forest of olive trees.

## EROSION

When the crisis of the sea announces her anger  
the island women fasten their clotheslines  
hang used panties for the wind to carry their scent  
across the triangular land

And as the sea's spontaneous capitulation  
adjourns another conquest  
the men in the mountains  
thank their saint for fertile land

and curse the coastal women for their wretched games

## VISIT AFTER A FAILED REVOLUTION

You cannot see  
the famous writer

The police relocated him  
and kissed him good-bye

and one of them kept on saying  
*Tell us about it . . .tell us about it*

*What do you do?*

*I thought we might all be of that something*

## SIMIC'S ARMY OF SPIDERS

He orders them to his New Hampshire basement.

It is 1990.

He gives no reasons. Only the promise  
to entertain with moths and fireflies

made from nails, aluminum foil, wire.

The spiders realize poetry writing's  
offal doesn't suit dainty stomachs.

And march to stage their gossamer putsch.

Head thrown back. Eyes trampled raw.  
Stringing sentences on a neck of war.

Simic bleeds in his study.

Hears them hail his lesion. Knot arachnid snares.  
Chart untold festivals in honor of the coup d'état.

A wounded prey, he shares their vision.

To spin a web of names.  
Trap something so immense.

Its every pore—a country of light.

VENETIAN DUET

we step onto the narrow bridge

she lifts her skirt

summons me to play  
her succulent violin

draw my tongue's tip  
across black strings

compose the sonata  
of a million unborn sins

nocturnes circulate  
as the evening sighs

the adagio of executions

## TIME

their last embrace

to conserve this moment  
he imagines time  
as a kaleidoscope of lovers

every artless turn a new possibility

\*

as a circle  
every embrace infinite in its repetition  
eternal recurrence of immutable gestures

one can let go—and simply wait . . .

\*

is discontinuous  
glimpses of the sometime / the impending / the steps of travelers  
the first taste of lemon ice / the numbness of hands  
every embrace a filament of light

\*

without quality  
his grasp resembles a dying child  
lovers never leave  
intensity dictates the duration of every touch

\*

as reflection  
ballistics, propelled emotions

(mirrors populate the panorama—all is shared a thousandfold)

every departure a bulwark of pain

\*

without memory  
she fades into the pulse of foreign scriptures  
as his eyes scan pages for the familiar  
every good-bye is death

\*

world without Time

still life of a final kiss

\*

as woman  
gently her arms wrench away to a future past  
their first coitus, their first encounter  
the day her eyes will mean nothing to him

UNTITLED

What I enjoy about chaos is the guarantee of creation  
The rapid unexpected

## TRAKL'S SEASON

Every image secrets its most haunting confession.

How to distinguish between voice and breeze  
in this lonely season?

Trace the maple's grief  
or follow blackbirds' lament into spring?

With frigid hands brushing  
against burning poppy fields.

A seat.

The reverie of decaying laughter  
from soldiers with shattered mouths.

And the wait for a stranger's lost shadow  
to muddle this autumnal foliage

as evening greets ancient pilgrims,  
whose voices once rested here to join

the discussions of drowned children.

EVERY SO OFTEN

remembrance appears  
around the corner

via a piece of literature  
a freshly picked fruit  
a scent

echo of an innocent view

it appears as a reminder:  
nothing in our lives ever disappears

it all merely lingers—faceless  
here and there

and every so often  
it knocks on your door  
seeking shelter for the night

## LULLABY

Voices through my window.  
The myth of grapes, cacti, burning fuel.

Headlights through my window.  
Prowling Scirocco wind—tango of ruffled ash.

A tamed evening departs.  
Darkness lit in red African sand.

I notice my daughter's slumberous smile.  
Cough heavily across waters.

Flames rise to devour a hill  
amidst the Sicilian night.

## SAMBUCA NIGHT

I feel most alive mingling  
with the beasts and giants  
of the mountains.

Hearing the fanfare  
announcing the barks  
of wild Sicilian dogs.

THE VOYEUR OF PÈRE LACHAISE

Surrounded by midnight's muted architecture  
barefooted—I slink across cobbled walkways

quietly observe stony mourners unrobe  
sculpted relics ploddingly seeking entry

polished skin invading cocoons of death

I listen for their first shared breaths  
as they repose by their fretted dead

and only when marble lips stress brittle bone  
do I abscond to haunt the next sepulchral act

yet no act will ever echo the first shared breath  
the moment the dead lost all regrets—the night

I saw two angels making love in the living grass

WITH FIONA, AGE 2, IN THE GARDEN

You enjoy no equals  
in the infinite world of perception.

Recognize the root of an appearance,  
advance with confidence and ease,

respond to its smiles as you turn  
to behold my ignorant gaze.

Know that your every glance assembles  
my reunion with the essence of existence,

my retreat from time and knowledge:  
science of life's bastard progenies.

## PATRIMONIAL RECIPE

I swore never to wear my father's mask.

Yet I meticulously peel and cut tomatoes.  
Crush garlic. Pluck basil bent  
low in observance. One  
by one. Push them off the plank.

Into the fervid blonde of olive oil.

Salt. Pepper. Dash of sugar.  
Then I sit down at the table.  
Yell at my children for being children.  
Ignore my wife—her voice:

the steam of boiling water.

And wait for the perfect consistency.  
*Al dente*. The callous core that weeps

when overcooked.

4:36 AM

*for G. Smith*

The poet who forgets to eat when his lovers are away  
sits up in bed and instantly tears off his skin  
to exploit raw, secure movement—turns

fondles her with dangling nerves

*Pardon me, you mind a drink?*  
*Naturellement*, the Word says

(a few pubic hairs sticking  
to the bottom of her tongue)

*Le Pont Mirabeau is never far*

He fucks with injurious vision.

## SPEEDOMETER NEEDLE

Foot anchored, its head lashes past lit auguries.

Governed by eyes firm to embrace, to forge  
a carbon fiber skirt around the nearest tree,

its slash body, mounted by g-forces, succumbs  
to an impetuous grin: acceleration's blackout.

Hood furrowed / Chassis rived / Headlights craned

Man's invention which most resembles a living thing  
bears the same fatal flicker as our suicidal tongues

anticipating the metallic savor of a .40 caliber cock.

WITNESS

realize the inability to emulate the basic pattern  
hear the blatant silence of dynamos  
feel the will's sudden sting

.....

moments carved in transient silhouettes  
veil the evening's restless minds

an acquiescent walk towards a dark room  
captures the image of bloodshot eyes

smiling at the young mother and her gun

## WOOD OF SUICIDES

Drop this soil  
sodden with torment

before the scalpel rain  
peels your twined fist.

Drop it by the thicket  
where you kissed children,

dug your fingers into the dirt,  
buried them without prayer.

Drop it.

Mark the causality of sin,  
of forgiveness, alongside

the river Phlegethon's seething  
maelstrom, its spiral narrative,

your barked soul  
that no longer shelters your scars.

## ESCAPE ARTIST

My mother missed her own funeral.

Why or how she did it is a mystery.  
Or a fantasy. I barely remember.

The blow of absence that shut the priest's  
voice like a child's very first nightmare.

The lump of air in my throat I kneaded  
until it became smoke, became breath.

Language nestled up against silence.

A lunatic sashaying past, grinning,  
*Doesn't anyone know where she is?*

What can I say? We all missed it. And left.

*Well, no wonder, someone muttered  
on my way past the holy water,  
She's a suicide, you know . . . and a whore.*

Yes, I thought.  
*Not even God can create a net without holes.*

## THEATRE DU GRAND GUIGNOL

Fifty lifeless characters animated.

The audience, astonished, reflected upon the preeminent importance:  
a curtain that never falls.

Performance and terror often contained an unconscious existence

*vacuous eyes*

nonchalantly rising above any great and definite achievement,  
while the Playbill attended a memorable ceremony:

*a writer's death flanked by language.*

Recently, the stage conceived a stranger, a sage, matters of occultism,  
in an attempt to stimulate man's inner need  
to move toward an addressable reality.

But the audience still believed in imitation, nothing more . . .

the applause raucous.

### About the Author

Daniel Pantano is an award-winning poet, translator, and editor of several European and American literary journals (*Härter*, *Niederengasse*, *M.A.G.*). Of Sicilian and German parentage, he was born in Langenthal, Switzerland, in 1976. His individual works have been featured in journals and anthologies in Europe, Asia, and the United States. He lives in Brandon, Florida, with his wife and two children.