

Crows, Reckoning

A crow remembers who crowded it out of the trash can,
who cast at it sticks and rocks and rockets fashioned from bottles.
Long after you have forgotten, the crow remembers your face,
the space between your eyes, the rise of your cheek,
your beakless maw, and with caw both credo and cri de coeur,
the crow causes you to recall that gardens are, by their nature,
not nature, but the cult of cranium over creation,
a human rebuke cloaked in clover and cockscomb and crocus.
A crow says, If a garden is not god-wrung, then who
seeded the Garden of Eden, crux of the human cradle,
till ceded by Adam and even then who, do you suppose,
forespoke the stain of Cain if not a crow, or a murder
of crows.

Imagine No Apples

All beginnings wear their endings like dark shadows.
—Chet Raymo, astronomer-physicist

All beginnings wear their endings like dark apples.
A is for apple. B is not for apple.
C, also not for apple. And so on.
Everything always ends up apple, or not apple.
Pick any beginning and there's the apple,
never falling far enough from the tree:
the apple and the omega.

All beginnings wear their apples like dark shadows.
For example, Eve in the Garden
stood beneath the Tree of Knowledge,
biting into forbidden fruit.
Beguiled but enlightened, sated and falling
she dragged all humanity with her by bruised heels
suddenly everyone banished from paradise.

All apples wear their shadows like dark endings.
For example, Newton in the garden
dozed beneath a tree, dreamt of seeking knowledge,
awoke to see a red globe falling.
Drowsy but enlightened with heaviness,
he saw one sad secret of the universe revealed--
suddenly everyone stuck to this planet.

All dark shadows wear their endings like beginnings.
But suppose not. Imagine no apples:
everyone still naked; all of physics stymied.
No one to say *Oh, this is gravity,*
or *Ah, this is sin.*
Would we be better off, would we be happier,
sinless and floating, or if not actually floating,
still capable of hoping to rise.

Mendeleev's Mandala

A house afire, or rather

his mother's glass factory, actually,
and under the smolder the child Dmitri
understood that he would reject the 4 elements
of water, earth, air, and fire to insist on an order
no one else noticed, like a secret 27th letter of
the alphabet, a chemical koan. It would take
many train rides, his flesh (carbon, hydrogen,

phosphorous) pressed to the window (silicon,
oxygen) before he could dream chemistry
out of chaos and into a grid, and with the gall
of gallium, leave spaces for what was still
missing. What less could he do, a boy who saw
his father go blind, his mother lose everything, a
child whose siblings numbered maybe 13, perhaps
14, no one knew which (but the sum is the secret

27), number of the element cobalt, which
Mendeleev in his table (less manual than mandala)
switched with nickel, seeing, despite atomic weight,
to which family it truly belonged. Once he'd deci-
phered the hidden matrix of matter, codex for the elixir
of existence, once he'd proven there are no spare parts,
he set out to show it's *all* spare parts. For refusing
haircuts and trimmed beards, for riding with the

peasants in 3rd class, for marrying 2 women
at once, even the czar forgave him. The chaos
he'd once chastened he now chased, his own
odyssey of periodicity, a conservation of
confusion. A mind this aligned must be
ransomed by entropy eventually: every fact/
(ory) is finally equal parts glass, equal parts
fire, which is to say: all fire, all beginnings.

The Mother of Nations Waits

Sarai, the Baroness of Barrenness,
the woman with a womb like a memory like a sieve,
sent a valentine to Wittgenstein, a poem to Plotinus,
a letter to Leibniz, inventor of the binary code.
Across the bottom of the pages, in lieu of X's and O's,
she scrawled strings of ones and zeros,
promises of everything and nothing,
and nothing in between.
(Not one answered.)

In the time before zeros
merchants marked nothing with nothing,
leaving spaces to show where something was missing.
But what shape was the space?
Sarai wanted to know, pressing on her midriff,
hoping that containing the emptiness
was a possibility.

And then there *were* zeros, just like that!
From Babylon came symbols whose presence
meant the absence of everything else.
All losses were made equal,
which was a relief to Sarai
and which wasn't.

Later Leibniz would spin whole worlds
out of ones and zeros
but what can you make from only zeros?
Whatever you add, that's still all you've got
and maybe you've lost yourself for the effort.
You can't be a little bit pregnant.

Abraham called to Sarai, husband of her broken heart,
but she was bent over a mathematics text,
muttering in not-yet-invented codes
(zeros and ones, eggs and sperm)
and she didn't hear.

Isaac called to her, son of her broken womb,
and she could not hear; an angel and a ram rescued him instead.

Or she heard, but could not believe she had heard.
Because while the opposite of being fertile is being barren,
the opposite of being barren is still being barren.