

HOW TO TELL IF A MOON IS WAXING OR WANING

is one question you might ask while crying
as you lean your forehead against a picture window
or hover on the bank of a dumbstruck river
which wends off to places about which no one
could ever possibly care.

Internalize, completely, why Meton of Athens
perched himself on a wicker chair in helpless silence—
432 BC—to catalogue lunar orbits and positions,
and his relief to discover time circles the heavens
via white shadow, every nineteen years, to restart

the same day and date it began. Crater
by crater, it's easy to believe in god-magic and vaticination
when a crescent disappears like a face under water.
A sad prediction: you'll know someone who wants
to kill themselves, if you haven't already.

They'll confess, abashed
and stuttering, because they care about you.
It will seem backwards. And then you can await
phasal shifts as this person oscillates between
yielding to pain and emerging from behind a black curtain

invisible to the eye.
Nineteen years—that's Odysseus white-knuckled

on the foredeck of a ship, splashing toward a phantasm
something like home. That's the age by which
the first suicidal thought knocks on the night door

to ask, aloofly,
for your hand in marriage; like most of us you probably
contemplated jumping off a bridge, in the abstract,
or a mound of pills, tumbling down the throat.
Such is the difference, experts say, between a thought

and
an ideation. For decades, archaeologists believed
the Paleolithic bone fragments found secreted
in the foothills of the Alps were dotted and marked
haphazardly, as though some idle caveman wiled away

bored hours on the first pointillism. Indeed, these the first
moon calendars, scrimshawed with scientific intent:
barefooted trails through the dust, a glancing
skyward intermittently to check if the moon would
still be there, fat and watchful as a nervous eye.

It's a planning, which takes memory; to ideate, one
must second-by-second remember they want to die.
The woman who spun me out into a whirl of tears waited

until the house was in careful sleep—her visiting mother,
cats,

even the neurotic poodle—before she tiptoed outside
to thread her noose over a low-hanging soffit. It took years
before I accepted how many feet, worldwide, shuffled
willfully to their own ends that night. In extremis
we glow important

beyond counting. Though some three thousand or so
other scintillas curlicued aimlessly into that dark beyond
dark, like solar flares averaged to a statistical recurrence,
I felt specific, reaching out for her one soul
thoughtlessly, the way a parent

throws their arm across a child just before the car
skids to stop short on the shoulder. But like astronomers,
they each soul charted a blank patch in the sky
and turned into nothing but theories of radiance
for theoretical generations—me—

to study. And if you're like me, it's time to ask
“who decides which theories are valid when none of them
ever work?” Okay, picture a guerilla war in the streets
of fifth century Alexandria between factions of solar
and lunar calendar acolytes. It happened: blood and light,

one half excising their months when the fingernail
of the waning moon is clipped clear off, the other
stretching upward to feel for gradients in warmth

like gibbons testing the air for God. I, too,
am terrified I'll evaporate into absence, and I just want

to know what matters. If you close your eyes
in a room with a clock, you can sense the hands
sweeping up after themselves, working to calculate
a remainder. We're gibbous to full, then crescent away,
then new, foolishly, when completely erased.