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This thesis is a collection of poems that explore the themes of subjectivity, historicity, isolation, displacement, alienation, mortality, and love. It is divided into two sections, one titled “A History,” which is a varied selection of poems written from the poet’s perspective, historical personas, or imagined characters. The second section, “Of Others,” is a poem sequence concerned with telling the story of Barney and Betty Hill, a married couple who claimed they were abducted by aliens in 1961. Their tale became the first tale of UFO abduction to sweep the nation, and ignited a cultural obsession with aliens that continues today. The poems give the Hills a life beyond their cultural legacy. They offer different theories on what actually happened to the Hills, begin to grapple with their interracial marriage that undoubtedly helped popularize their story, as well as consider the meaning of the word “alien” throughout history and the word’s implications. Through these two sections, the poet attempts to provide both a detailed “history” of those who have been made into “Others,” as well as a way forward for any who feel outside a cultural, societal, or political norm.

A HISTORY OF OTHERS

by

Michael Pittard

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APPROVAL PAGE

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I.
A HISTORY

Someone said once that God lives on

the other side of the lake.
It might be so. I've heard
if you gather leaves to set
on fire & breathe the smoke,
God will emerge from behind
a holly tree & answer your questions.

Such as why do I have to burn
things to have a conversation
with Him. Or why I can't seem
to ever find a comfortable pair
of socks. Or why can't I pinch
a raindrop between my thumb
& forefinger to squeeze it & see
the world clearly, only for a moment,
& know what my future holds.

I've never been to the other side
of the lake. The bridge is almost
always out & it's too far to swim.
A man from town once waded out,
his pockets filled with rocks.
His glasses washed up a few days
later & when I put them on,
the view through the cracked lenses
hurt so much I threw them back into
the water where they sank
without so much as a ripple.

Underneath the tree roots God
slinks about as a black snake,
warming Himself in the afternoon
sun & slowly digesting mice. Or
maybe He's a starling, His wings
shimmering from a high branch.
I suppose He watches those who
come to talk, sees their hesitations,
the match trembling
in their hands.

Reynolds Homestead— Critz, VA

It's two miles away, the historical marker
announces. Take a left, round the pine
tree bend, park in the gravel lot.

When we follow the brick path
we find more brown signs.
Boxwoods dot the corners, small

ironwork firewood cradles hem us
in when we stray too far to puzzle
over the wooden frames in the long

grass field. The brown signs say,
“Admire how the house is simple,
only two fireplaces, one at each

end of the house, in the study and
in the kitchen. See the green stairs
to the front door, the pantry stocked

with cornhusks and flour canisters,”
a smoke detector. My family imagines
the creaking of the floor is how it sounded

then, just a few rotten boards replaced.
“Now,” the signs command, “follow the
arrows through the kitchen door, walk

the path the servants walked to the icebox,
to the curing shed, where the tobacco hung
out to dry through the humid summers.”

Under a lone sycamore, its trunk
covered in cicada husks, eight graves
make a quaint plot, the latest died in 1916.

An infant square, *Loved in Christ*, b. & d. 1844.
When we walk past the low white fence, the
frames stick out from the wooded edge.

Hollow homes, hollow hearths. No brown signs
in the still fertile ground. These are the “servant
quarters.” Or at least, the foundations and the ruins.

In the forest, we see an ivy patch riddled with poison,
an ankle high fence. No crosses or infant squares.
Jagged stones, if anything. My mother brushes

back the leaves, examines the divots in the earth.
“Slave’s bodies,” she says, “were buried in wicker
baskets.” As the wicker decays, the earth caves

to fill the void. Sometimes the only way
to find a grave is by the curvature of the soil,
by an absence, not a presence.

Society for a Flat Earth

When Pharaoh asked me to prove
the world is flat I told him it's all
ice at the end of the world.

The mountains near the edge hide
a sheer drop into blackness, punctuated
only by flickers of light from the stars.

God set them in the Firmament as
guides for the lost souls of the night,
signal-flares of hope for the wayward

men who stamp their feet under lamp
posts on cold and snowy evenings.
These wayward men learned long ago

to love the inky blackness at the limits
of the world. They have passed on
their knowledge of the end to their

sons, and the sons to sons of their own.
Think, Pharaoh, of the sons who drop
countless coins into the void, knowing

they will fall halfway down before they turn
around and land in our still open palms.
When Pharaoh asked me why the mast

of a returning ship is seen before its body,
I told him the horizon lies. Straight
lines can never be trusted.

In The Year 734

The moon coated in blood.
Falling in cascades, caught
in flasks or cups. Drink &
the blood cures all sickness.
When it rains, the blood fades
but does not vanish. It lingers
in the dirt, stains fingernails
& the woodcutter's ax. Women
dye garments in red rivers.
Boys paint monsters who
eat their fathers, other mean
children, the priest. Lions, wolf-
men, fire-breathers, creatures
brave enough to let their desires
go. Oh to be that eager to devour
legs & brains & arms & hearts

Cando, 1994

for Khaetlyn

It is no ill-omen though it seems one,
this fireball that streaks through the sky.

The crease it leaves through the soil
ends in emptiness, a crater but no rock.

We do not live in a time of magic yet we do
live in a time of suspicion. An absence cannot

be an absence, a question cannot be left alone.
Visitors must descend from above, gas must

stay beneath the Earth. Everywhere, everywhere,
we look & cry for solutions, beg for theories

to tell our children & ourselves. A vanishing is
abhorrent, an aberration to be blighted out with

logic & data, clues & answers. But darling keep
this locket close to your heart, acknowledge its secrets

& pet the chain that guards your neck. It will never
let harm befall you. No, this is not magic that protects,

this is science & hard reason. When the next meteor screams
into the night, hold the locket close, whisper affirmations,

let it burrow beneath your skin & sleep.

Sandman

I'm not sure you can hear it,
the late night airplane roar
lost in cloudy, starry skies.
I want to turn your lamp back
on, so together we can name
passengers; piece together their
stories, journeys, and itineraires.

Before you fell asleep, we traveled
by camelback, bivouacked on the
west side of a sand dune. I drew
the lines of Orion's Belt, pointed
to the purple dot of his dagger.
You told me that in that dot
gas and dust and old stars billow,
just as the sand between our toes
scatters and breaks away at night.

But you started yawning, so I drew
the blanket close. It gets so cold,
even in the Sahara, you said. Tomorrow,
I replied, we'll reach the city, and eat dried
apricots swiped from a market stall. We
might take off our dirty boots, dangle
our feet in the marbled fountain, pluck up
a few small coins from the tiled bottom,
catch a show in the theater district,
where the king is a fool,
and a fool is the king--

Snoring interrupts me, so I leave our plans
for morning, when the sun cresting over the dune
hitting the water of the oasis will wake you.
For now, I move your head from my shoulder
to the cool pillow. I think of the people
on the airplane, of how we are always leaving
and always returning.

Pliny the Younger Contemplates the Existence of Ghosts

My freedman awoke in a pile,
his own hair all around him.
Although he shares the bed with his
younger brother, my freedman assures
me a ghost is responsible. I cannot
discount the reality of spirits; I find
myself believing in a world beyond
the curtains of my darkened bed,
a world that vanishes with the sunrise.

The philosopher Athenodorus once
visited a villa where clanking chains
could be heard in the dead of night.
He spent the whole time writing,
ignoring the phantom he could feel
just over the shoulder. Out of the
corner of his eye he could see it
pointing, its shackles dangling, to
a tree through the window. Next
morning, Athenodorus ordered the
ground under the tree to be dug up
and there were its bones, its chains.
They were given a proper burial.

I cannot doubt the word of my man
because I was freed as was Athenodorus'
specter, because Domitian has died and
amongst his things were found false
letters against me, because everyone
knows the guilty wear their hair long,
because now I am shorn every night, because
when my uncle died in volcanic ash, I thought
I understood the contortions of death, how
a chronicle twists and bends to reflect
the living and their sins.

But now I fear my uncle floats
above my bed, his mouth agape,
scissors in his hands. He is frozen
for all time beneath the earth. I cannot
give him the burial he asks me for;
I cannot retrieve his body from Pompeii.

I leave now for Bithynia and Pontus.
I take only my letters and my household.
Tacitus once asked if I believe in ghosts.
I pray he finds my scrolls and learns the truth.

How to Hide A Body

It won't decompose in stages.
In fact it might never rot, you could
be stuck with this body holding you

in place against your will.
Your house might turn strange;
doors open to second-floor drops

or tiles weep dirty water. Ghosts
shift your plate and you spike
your dinner in panic.

Spirits still strip the copper
wiring from your brain, they mine
iron ore from your veins. Listen,

you can't erase your body,
scrub it clean or plunge it
with cinder blocks into a deep pond.

So you have to let the pressure
build until your pipes begin
to burst. Write an essay

called "How to Murder Your Husband."
Follow your own advice, pull
the trigger yourself.

Let someone else sort out
how to lock your hands
behind your back.

Beheading A Fish

It's much easier with a sharper knife.
The chainmail glove over your dominant hand
is there for protection from a slip or a twitch.

The glove should be snug;
customers might comment on your
readiness for medieval combat.

A push, then a slight drag splits muscle.
Do not saw; use two hands if you must.
Avoid looking in the lidless eyes.

There, you are finished.
Now ask the customer if they want the head.
After all, they've already paid for it.

Lefkada (August)

Too many cats eating
fishbones behind the kitchen

I need to turn around now
these cobbled roads

blend together they jump out
grab me saying come

look around the corner
what I'm after is not here

in the Orthodox symbols
adorning the ruby red

stained glass windows
I want to see waves

sulking just offshore
They will leave me

heaving on a pebbled
beach beneath white plaster

windmills slowly turning
The golden observatory

on the mountains behind
watches me and stands

in judgement of all
the men who have come

before me to test themselves
in these blue waters

And like those men
I am forced to accept

a power I cannot have

In The Year 671

A great mortality of birds.
Their feathers embalmed
in mud, talons snipped off
for a necklace. Mornings find
bodies by the river, beaks open
for the sky & it is marvelous,
the many deaths of small things.
In the well, four sparrows drawn
up with the bucket. The lord eats
heron eggs for breakfast & gives
more to his servants. How easy to
take omens for granted, to assume
answers will always be provided.
How to ask God for life, despite
its natural & unnatural endings.
Better to cut open the birds,
read their entrails, the bloodlines
spouting forth in the dirt.

A Collection of Signs That It Approaches

1. A crow with a potato in its beak
2. A disappointing meteor shower
3. Newly purchased books missing their last pages
4. ~~Lightbulbs 37% brighter~~
5. Alleyways all lead back the way you came
6. Friends using the name only Mother calls you
7. Kitchen sink clogged by a mysterious piece of rubber
8. Helicopter flies overhead clearly going *away* from the hospital
9. The sea monkeys you order never arrive
10. Waitress brews another pot before serving your coffee
11. Toothbrush falls into toilet
12. News anchor peers into your soul¹
13. Two radio stations playing same song right after each other
14. Two dead trees in neighbor's front yard
15. Unused laundry hookup gurgles in the middle of the night
16. Tripping on the stairs, both up and down
17. Chimney flue will not stay closed
18. Ants frozen to the windowsill
19. Ice melts 37% slower
20. Pillow not cool on the other side
21. Old man on red motor scooter circling the block
22. Bananas ripe for 37% longer
23. Church sign misspelling Jesus Christ
24. Trash pickup missing a day
25. Sun rising at 6:37am instead of 6:36am
26. Migraines of increasing pain/duration
27. ~~Sudden nut allergy~~
28. Too many clowns at harvest festival
29. Teenagers smoking outside the grocery store²
30. [REDACTED] I don't know myself
31. Ant traps always full of that sickly sweet smell
32. Three men in black suits outside neighbor's house (WITH THE DEAD TREES)
33. Falling asleep 37 minutes later than usual
34. Fireflies inside house in September
35. Plato's cave begins to make sense
36. Assuredness of the existence of the Boogeyman
37. Growing obsession with the number 37

¹ & you have been found wanting

² & what they were smoking remains unknown

Hazmat Man

I wonder if he wakes up in that suit,
sleeps with a gasmask on;
or if he tears the suit off a hanger
in a closet full of purple rubber gloves;
or if he pulls the suit from a box,
like a lemon-scented trash bag;
or if he wears the suit at breakfast,
bits of cheddar cheese sandwich
bouncing off the suit, a puddle
of crumbs on the dining room floor;
or if he bathes, plastic-bound, with
a yellow duckie losing the color from its eyes.

I wonder if his suit is still perfectly white
by the end of his day, and if he is still perfectly dry,
still protected from the dangers of water.

Orienteering Course

For the path is already cut.
For there are many benches
& picnic tables, should you
need nourishment or rest
before the trail's end.

For each bench is named
after those who began
before you arrived.
For they spent long hours
with the lily pads, the
ducks that grew old & left.

For the garden holds
a single red rose & the
orchard Asian pears too
green, too soft, to taste.
For the branches are bent
back & the trunks are notched.

For though the signs point
in both directions, you still
must take your shoes off & walk
in the leaves & dirt. For if you
know where to look, the path
will always bring you back home.

Solitaire

The cards are in order
by suit and color.

It's the fourth or fifth
round I've dealt while

sitting on brown-stained
carpet. The game is easier

to win then it was at first.
My watch's faint clicking

interrupts my strategy.
Is this the third time I've

failed to place the jack of hearts?
Perhaps I know already to change

the rules when it suits me.
It's still raining, and you are still

not home. A squirrel thunders
through the gutters chasing another.

I want to show you all the blue spots
on the aces, how I have organized

my memories into four mostly
straight lines, red on black,

black on red.

Revelation

You can't leave the radishes
on the table because the sun
will only devour them. Instead,
rip the green leaves from their
heads & leave the carcasses
to rot. Who are you to try to
eat radishes? Carrots too, come to
think of it. These veggies crunch
& bite back at your teeth.
They are not meant to be tamed.
Help yourself to the soft or the
cultivated. Refrain from the great
choices in life. The red angel of Death
will still suck your soul out from
between your toes before moving
on to your neighbor's house, his
knock so gentle, one would never
know he had called at all.

In The Year 744

The stars went swiftly shooting.
Across the blackness & back
again. No logic, no regard
for the direction of the moon,
which rises & falls twice each
night, first in its crescent & then
in its ripeness. Heaven wages
war against the sky, or the sky
wages war against Heaven. It is
not to be known for we are weak.
Blue & green waves crash around
the horizon, argue against any
distinction between atmospheres.
No sleep comes as the cosmos
resist the Earth. The universe
continues. It is ignorant.

Whether Holy Scripture Should Use Metaphor?

It is befitting Holy Writ to put forward divine and spiritual truths by means of comparison with material things... Sacred doctrine makes use of metaphors as both necessary and useful. — *Summa Theologica*

Aquinas believes that it should.
Metaphors are how you find
your way past the barn door in the
rain, ducking inside just before the
Heavens burst, how you smell the
wet hay and the sleeping old dogs.

It is useful to know what is
sacred about creeks and their
minnows, what is doctrine
about rivers and their tides.
It is the way to see God in
the snow, in the flakes dusting
a windowsill, a lover's touch
when it is late, the moon is big,
the stairs not yet climbed before bed.

A metaphor must eat at your heart
and find a way to bind you to the
Earth. This art we ply is *the least of
all sciences*. We pluck on our veins
and play our organs and hope
the audience can hear it as song of
our bodies made manifest. But is
all we need to sit on a bench
with a bag of bread, to pass out
nourishment for free to those who ask,
to *give not that which is holy to dogs?*

Next Time A Flamethrower

I use a flat head screwdriver, pry the English
ivy tendrils from the decaying poplar bark.
The vines reach high above me so I attack
from the middle, knowing the leaves
wither in a few days, a week.

The old man beside me uses shears, calls
flat head screwdrivers *advanced technology*.
He advises going for the base, plunging my gloved
hand deep into the green, severing the climbing creeper
from the point it reaches for something higher.

Granddaddy long legs scurry, not down to safety
but up towards the light and the vines clinging
on. Of course, these same trees will be covered
with ivy next year, or a few months, but there is
pleasure in ripping roots from their anchors.

Perhaps next time a flamethrower. Next time Agent
Orange and gas masks, or only my bitten, dirty
fingernails clawing at what always grows up.

In The Year 1030

The Holyrood discovered.
Not only God blesses His
children with dreams of
relics & bones. The cross
buried, dirt under the bent
nails & worms in its cracks.
A man digs up St. Michael's
Hill, hauls the site of Jesus'
death to his church. It is black
& waterlogged & beetles eat
the wood even as it rests
behind the altar, their pincers
destroying, consuming. The
man sits in the front pew,
singing fervent, asking for
comfort in this world & the
next. Satan resting beside
him, smiling, with termites
dancing in his teeth.

To The Praying Man in Rothko Chapel, Houston

In bewildered silence
broken only by coughs
and sneezes, you kneel
on the prayer mat and I
rest on a wooden bench
next to my mother who
swears she sees the Virgin
Mary in the triptych you,
Praying Man, refuse to
acknowledge though you
worship at its feet.

Last May, a man poured
white paint in the reflection
pool and dropped flyers
reading "It's okay to be white"
outside the Chapel doors, so I
understand your exhaustion,
the need to collapse before
these monochrome paintings.

I will never see God
in a piece of burned toast,
or notice him standing
behind me, finger to his lips,
poised to tap me on the shoulder
in solemn and happy invitation.
If only I would turn around to
hold his gaze before bending
my knee to weep.

I cannot decide to act as if
in a museum or in a church,
to admire these paintings for their
textures, how their fading over the
years revealed the brush strokes,
or to adore this silence we have all
agreed to. But you have decided,
Praying Man. Indeed, you were
here before I opened the door.

II.
OF OTHERS

Theory #1

Everyone has wanted to slip away
from Earth, to jump for the sky

and never come down. The Hills wanted
it a bit more, exhausted from the

looks, frowns, and muttered discontents,
even on vacation, even in Canada,

even on a two-lane road late at night
when the moon seems to follow

every passerby as it slinks between the
thin high clouds of autumn.

All it takes is a suggestion, a prodding
in the right direction. A shooting

star, an airplane glimpsed in the corner
of an eye, a unrecognized humming

from the car's engine. A sister claiming
flying saucers stole her child

becomes a dream of abduction, of horror
as the couple swerves on the road,

as adrenaline kicks in and the night closes
in fast around to swallow them

in its darkness, in its wonder.

UFO CHILLER—DID THEY SEIZE THE COUPLE?

Oct. 25th, 1965

by John Luttrell, *Boston Traveler* Staff Reporter

PORTSMOUTH, NH— When Mrs. Betty Hill agreed to take her husband, Barney, to hypnotic therapy in Boston, her hope was that Dr. Benjamin Simon would help figure out the cause of her husband's stomach ulcers and his near-chronic exhaustion. What she didn't expect was for Dr. Simon, after several months of hypnotic sessions, to play back numerous tapes of the Hills confessing to being abducted by aliens! "It was astounding, and at first I couldn't believe what I was hearing, my voice, Barney's crackle and cough, but Dr. Simon insists that the both of us, under hypnosis, told him all these amazing stories!"

Mrs. Hill, 46, a well-respected social worker, and Mr. Hill, 43, a US Postal Service employee and Portsmouth NAACP member, hardly seem the type to make up an encounter with extraterrestrials. But there may be more to this couple than meets the eye. Mrs. Adele Darrah, a neighbor of the Hills, told this reporter that Barney left his first wife for Betty, abandoning her and their two sons in Philadelphia. "The most scandalous part is that Barney and Betty met when she was just a waitress serving Barney's family when they were on vacation at Hampton Beach," said Mrs. Darrah.

While under hypnosis, the Hills recalled a frantic chase on the night of Sept. 19th, 1961, with a great big ball of light following them, zipping across the sky. After pulling over on the side of the road, they saw a cigar-shaped craft land in the woods and "beings" forced open their car doors and knocked them unconscious. Barney remembers an examination, a probing, if you will, with alien fingers pinching his skin and exclaiming how dark it was compared to Betty's. Betty says she spoke directly to the alien leader, a being taller than the rest who told her that they visit Earth often. Then the aliens wiped

the Hill's memories and returned them to their car. They drove back to Portsmouth in a daze, and only vaguely had any recollections of UFOs. It was only after each of them had suffered serious medical conditions that they sought professional help to figure out if some subconscious stress might be the cause of their maladies.

Numerous calls into the Portsmouth Air Force Base for confirmation of a possible UFO on the night the Hills say they were abducted have gone unanswered. A written request for information was returned with a hand-written note: "The Air Force can neither confirm nor deny the existence of UFOs. However, only one report has been made to this base regarding the Hills, and it was made by Barney Hill himself. The base sent two officers to interrogate the Hills shortly thereafter, and their report was kept on file." The note was unsigned.

Theory #2

The Leader clamped dirty rags
over the mouths of the Hills.
Induced a fugue state, a foggy trance.
Led them up a steep ramp into the belly
of their craft. The others scurried
around prepping tests and experiments,
test tubes and needles.

Betty remembers alien hands
all over her body, touching, poking,
grabbing. The Leader took a liking to her.
In his office he showed her
star maps, trade routes, flight paths.
She tried to find Earth, to find home,
and failed. The Leader laughed.
She couldn't comprehend galactic
economic systems. How primitive!

When the examination was over, and
Barney drove back for home, Betty
asked him, "Now do you believe
in flying saucers?" Barney couldn't
help but nod his head, because
somewhere in the weeds and flowers
and thickets of Indian Head,
New Hampshire, the Hills woke up.
Maybe these beings needed to be remembered.

Did the Leader know that the Hills would never
forget his face? How their story spread and soon
the Leader's visage adorned balloons at state fairs;
his eyes and thin lips on ice pops and magazines,
his bulbous fingers reaching out towards us,
wanting?

The Apple-Smellers

...and when Pseudo-Moses of Chorene names a few of the forty-three races in Scythia, he says of the rest, “The other people bear some barbarous names; it is superfluous to name them here.” Could it be that the Apple-Smellers were not native to India at all, but instead resided in the unreached land east of the Caucasus mountains? For where else would bad odors be hidden but by the mists of Xanadu, by the fair-smelling flowers of the Hyrcanian? The Lotus-Eaters would be envious of the fragrances draped around every man and woman in these plains of paradise.

Oh to live only by smell alone! To seek the new and joyous in a cooked game hen! The sights that fill my eyes daily pale in comparison to the insinuations of my nose. And what is a “bad odor” to me? To the Apple-Smellers? Pliny the Elder writes of instant death should these virgin peoples’ orifices be breached by some foul scent, but when all your senses are lost to that of the powerful memory of smell, even the cisterns of the townwatch barracks would be a wonder to behold, every corner hiding something of the sensual. I would choose the plumpest onion to hang upon my hip, its gradual decaying guiding me to new emotions and sensations. The onion, Hippocrates states, is blessed with the ability to ward off the tiny demons that crawl under our skin to lay their eggs and cause illness and disease. Perhaps if the Apple-Smellers knew of the delightful onion they would live their lives not by what smells the sweetest, or by what meat is most tender upon the tongue, but by the fruit that is most practical and suited to the everyday.

Megasthenes describes the Apple-Smellers as mouthless, covered in hair and dirt from head to foot. Their garments they make from the softest bark of the nearest trees, and the gentlest leaves they find they wear upon their heads, hiding their modesties before God, though only a handful of civilized Europeans have come across them, as alien and hidden from our world as they are...

Climbing Clear Up to the Sky

He heads out, a slight
frown on his face,
to the office when the stars
have just come out.

My sister once saw a bright light
at this time of night. It hovered,
whisked back and forth.
She called her husband and they watched
it zip across the sky, no bigger than a nickel
held out at arm's length.

As I watch Barney leave I look
to the heavens and see
his dark body in silhouette against
the pinpricks. How can this man
be so steady?

They give us dirty looks
when we eat dinner
in a different town.

I don't know if I can
make him rest. Make him get
behind the wheel, sing in his hoarse
voice, "Oh what a beautiful morning," fly
northwards over Route 3, over the White
Mountains, and away.

*

Her body convulses
When I cut
A lock of hair

My assistant shouts
Forces open her mouth

Hooks his thumb behind
Her molars
Pulls forward what Does he imagine

Her teeth
extractable

He says her husband
Has removable teeth
But her's resist

She laughs then
Apparently awake
Mutters *dentures*

What does he eat *he loves*
squash
What is squash

I ask *yellow like the sun*
You peel it mash
It with salt

Pepper butter in the summer
His teeth
Are old mine
Are young I ask

What is old
The skin wrinkles
The hair grays
Over the years

What is years
She could not tell
Me only a way

To measure time
She wants to remember
Our encounter

I press a book
In her hands
Can you

Read this I ask her
No she answers
But when I turn

Its pages when I
Smell the binding
I will know I can

Never forget this

Close Encounter of the Fourth Kind

All the hovering and abrupt shifts in speed
isolate you, a maze drawn on the sky that

you mirror with your movement, the minotaur
picking up Ariadne's thread to reconfigure

the labyrinth. Once you are alone, the beams
overwhelm you, press blue blobs on your eyeballs,

a forearm held up in self-defence. You stagger back,
what else can you do, but then they vanish, the air

heavy with the sudden absence. Did they land?
Look, the tall grass is brown, flattened in circles.

That must be where the landing gear rested, and
the long line in the dirt where the boarding ramp

descended. Where you on board? Did the green
men rub their fingers all over your body? Surely

they must have, because those moles and scars
weren't there before. You feel woozy; you want

to sit in an armchair clutching a strong drink
by the brim of the glass with all five of your

fingers. Did they have five? Or three long
pitcher plant fingers ready to suck you inside

with the promise of nectar and ambrosia?
You can't trust clocks. They always give up

at the first sign of trouble. You can't tell if
the phone always rang that many times

before the answering machine picks up.
You can't stay here, they know where you live.

You move to Florida and live in a hotel by the sea while scouting the local real estate market. You notice a sign for

the *14th Annual Tampa Abductees Conference*. You open the door and step into the lights. You are home now.

It is safe. No one will question your story, undercut your paranoia. After all, it has happened to them as well

Dissociative Amnesia

This won't work if you don't
close your eyes. It doesn't take
a swinging watch or a magic
word muttered three times
under my breath. Anyone can
be hypnotized if they just relax.

I know, I know, you've seen the
old movies with voodoo zombies,
their obliterated pupils, the whites
of their eyes so large and willing,
but please, I won't even ask
you to leave your seat.

Those ulcers in your stomach
will only grow more cancerous
and your warts will prickle at
the slightest touch. The body is
incapable of handling the stress,
the pressure to get better.

Your wife drove you three hours
in the car just to have these sessions
with me. Look, I treated soldiers,
unwove their memories and laid
them out on the floor like a scarf
when the knitting needles fall out.

The unexamined life is not worth
living, and that includes the subconscious.
Together, we will go deeper, deeper into
that September night without pain or
hurt, and if I were to stick this pin into your
arm, why, you wouldn't notice it all.

As I stroke your hand, the sensation
will become normal, you won't be
anxious or nervous, you will feel
my fingers tracing your palm lines,
and now, Barney, you will tell me everything.

The Robe of Merlin

I feel I should...clear... public misconceptions...which often envelop hypnosis with an arcane charisma, and the practitioner with the robe of Merlin.

-From Dr. Simon's introduction to *The Interrupted Journey*

But wouldn't Merlin enjoy
the swinging watch, the murmured
reassurances, the false security
of it all? The Merlin I know--

having encountered him so often
in coffee shops and hotel lobbies,
any place I could pull out a book
for five minutes--

the Merlin I know would cross
his eyes and stick his finger
up his nose in eagerness to
learn a new method of magic.

It's not as if hypnosis isn't arcane,
as if it's job isn't to dig out the dirt
covering one memory while burying
another with the pile of loose soil.

You can't tell me, Dr. Simon,
that you wouldn't love to twirl
your elaborate waxed moustache
in front of a black and white backdrop.

We all wear robes: lab coats and ties,
high heels and pointy hats. Why not
admit the secret we share, Dr. Simon,
the one between just you and me?

We both know the veil between different
truths is riddled with moth holes; that a
little of the extraordinary always crosses
over into hard science. They are inseparable,

as the moon from the tide or the stars
from the sky. The unknown will always
knock on our door, Doctor Simon,
but we must decide:

whether to let it in
with a friendly wave,
or to close our eyes
and fall asleep.

Hypnosis Session

And what do you remember?

Fishing poles, a net, some nightcrawlers
wriggling in my son's fingers.

Why does this memory come to you?

Water in his tennis shoes, socks stripped off
and set to dry. His feet magnified
in the current, minnows nibbling
at his toenails.

Answer the question.

His fingers pointing skywards. A crop duster
making long circles amongst the clouds.
The net splashing in the creek,
a deer's hoof print in the sand.

Tell me about the airplane, Barney.

The engines growing louder. The sun on
my neck, a mosquito refusing to die.

And what of your son?

His hand in mine as we duck, hiding his
body with mine as the plane dives
down, its parabola cresting just above
the trees on the bankside.
The growling engines fade,
then rise again as the pilot
swings back for another pass.

He pauses.

Four times he buzzed us, four times
I thought if only I was back
on the air base with my sidearm,
four times I thought is this because of the color
of my son's skin.

He grows panicked, speaks faster.

His hand opening the car door,
his mouth slight and unsmiling.
His eyes on my wife.

I could see the wonder in them.
I have seen the same wonder
everywhere we go.
Who are you to walk with this white
woman? Who are you to mend her dresses,
eat the dinners she cooks you?
Who are you to her?

*Go back to the earlier memory.
This airplane, was it like the one at Indian Head?*

No, because that one moved too fast,
too suddenly. Yes,
because they both wanted to hurt me
and my family.

And did they hurt you, Barney?

How could they not?

Theory #3

They should know they can't just walk in here,
hands in their jackets, hunger on their faces.
They're not supposed to be seen
this way. Better for the black one to order
alone, for him to wait in the corner, take
the food back to the car in a doggy bag.

No, they walked in here and just asked
for a booth, and we can't have that.
The waitress glances in our direction,
her nerves leaving coffee rings on the table.
The white one orders a milkshake, of all things,
and we can't help but twist Indian burns
on our arms. This couple. They should know better.

When the burgers arrive; they eat like they've
known real hunger, like their plates might be
snatched away from them at any time.
We get that. In fact, that might be the only thing
we have in common, a shared understanding
of the justice American meat can serve.

They should know better than to live this life
of theirs where we're trying to live our own.
And what they don't know are the twisting
backroads of the White Mountains, how
a flashlight from a hilltop will follow you,
just like a shooting star, how a couple of headlights
in the forest will make you think there are dozens
of us, that our white hoods wait in our trucks.

We won't hurt them, much. We don't even have
to steal anything. We just have to remind them
that everytime they think they can walk among us,
we're waiting, we're watching, that this land is ours
and we're just letting them live on it.

Pardon My Reach

I didn't mean
to spill the sugar
into your lap.
Your son, playing with
the salt and pepper
shakers on the table,
sprawled his imagination
out over the confines
of the booth. The boardwalk din,
the door's constant chime,
played as background noise to his
invented scene. Your wife,
yes, your wife, she didn't pay
your son any mind.
She wanted her coffee but
the cream was gone.

I reached to grab the empty cup;
your son moved the
sugar just as my hand arrived (isn't it
funny how vessels abide
by a different law of physics,
follow different rules of
time and space), and then the sugar
was in your lap,
all over your slacks, your eyes
were in mine, absolving
my fault, all my faults.

Barney, you must have
known then, I know I did, that soon
everything broken, everything spilled,
in my life was going to be fixed.

The Green Children of Woolpit

...but we shouldn't talk to them. The town sent a messenger to King Stephen, saying "Woolpit is in danger. Two beings from another world are terrorizing us. Send soldiers, send weapons, send help." But that was two weeks ago. We have received no reply.

Their faces are too gaunt, too ghastly. John says he saw them as he gathered firewood the other day. He offered them a rind of cheese, a heel of bread, as if to tell them, "I mean no harm." But he says the two Children just stared at him, their mouths open and black, until he turned and fled the forest. Edward asked them once if they know the King, and this seemed to intrigue the Children. Their eyes sparked and the forest grew large around them. They spoke but the words twisted themselves around their foreign tongues, catching on the branches and the ivy, staining the world a dark inky color. Edward claims they only eat the beans that grow in Sarah's garden, the beans the same pale green as the Children's skin.

When my brother and I go to sleep, I sometimes hear the Children singing, a sad strange song which I can almost understand. I started humming it on my way to the smithy. One day a traveler heard me, asking, "Is that the song of St. Martin's Land?" I told him I had never heard of such a place, that it was simply a tune that I had picked up somewhere. The man shook his head and crossed himself. "St. Martin's Land," he said, "is just another name for Hell. The green alien peoples that live there sing a song just like it before they crawl upwards; it is a spell to shrink the body so they can slither between the rocks and roots of good English soil. When they reach the surface, they take on the form of that which people desire to see most, a loss of some kind that a town will never get back, the theft of an innocence astray."

It was no surprise when the Boy Child died, but the Sister lived on. Her skin turned from green to white, her tongue wound its way around our words, and she took many men into her bed, where she whispered of an enchanted land underneath the earth, and softly crooned that song which has never left my mind...

Zeta Reticuli

Our planet freezes
over with silver
mercury when our
suns disappear
behind each other

They are dying
slowly crashing
a closing circle
of gravity that
crushes us down

The mercury seeps
out of cracks and rivulets
pools under houses to
tease apart the foundations
When it hardens it

mirrors a moon
we saw once near
a far watery planet
Craters and seas of rock
in oblong shapes

In the reflection
our eyes emit
a pale light Our
thousand pupils can
only take in so much

before spitting some
back out We make
our lives brighter
as the world dims
We hope to glimpse

other brighter worlds
when we visit you
We see better at night
When we take you up
we want you to see

everything by the
grey glow of our eyes
as we see everything
yellow and red and
fiery in yours

UFO Abductees Convention, 2002

I'm in front of bright lights
and water bottles, cheap fabric
table covers and slightly buzzing
microphones.

My hand is sore. I signed books,
posters, I WANT TO BELIEVE
t-shirts, replicas of the map
I saw on board the flying saucer,
alien figurines, and plush dolls.

I tell my story again.

But this time, it's not a doctor's
incredulous silence that greets
me when I pause for breath. It's
applause and hoots and hollers.

The audience revels in my presence
as I recount Barney's nervousness,
my probing, our release, the
hypnosis sessions. They know
this story. I recognize some

devotees from other conventions,
their faces flushed. Such trust they
give me. Force on me. A man
sobs as he waits in line for the
Q&A session. He says that the Grays

took him while walking his dog,
a dachshund just like Delsey.
Small men ran around him,
shaving his fingernails,
plucking his leg hair,
stuffing cotton balls down
his throat to collect his spit.
And a tall Leader watching him
his black eyes never blinking.

He woke up four hours later in a
supermarket parking lot, his
watch still stuck at 10pm
his dog licking his hands,
his hair. The man cries to
the room, to me *No one
cares. No one believes
me.* But I do. We do, here,
in this room. We have to.

I have to.

Even as I hear the same story,
my story, endlessly, endlessly.

NOTES

“Reynolds Homestead— Critz, VA”: Also known as the Rock Spring Plantation, the Reynolds Homestead is the birthplace of Richard Joshua Reynolds, the founder of R.J. Reynolds Tobacco. The home is a historical site in Southern Virginia.

“Society for a Flat Earth”: The premise of this poem is based on a riddle I read once in a book that asked the reader to imagine proving to an unnamed Egyptian Pharaoh that the world is round. By showing Pharaoh that you can only see the mast of a ship as it comes in to view right by the horizon, it proved the curvature of the Earth. If the world was flat, you could see the whole ship as soon as it came close enough for human eyes to see. The “Pharaoh” in question might have been Ptolemy the First, one of the finest astronomers and cartographers of the ancient world.

“In The Year 734”: The first line is taken from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, a historical document dating back to the early medieval period. Monks would write an account of the important events of the year, and sometimes a “marvel” would happen, such as the moon turning the color of blood or a dragon flying across the sky.

“Cando, 1994”: In 1994, a large fireball was seen by several dozen witnesses over the skies of Cando, Spain. Various explanations include a failed military experiment, aliens, or a natural gas explosion.

“Pliny the Younger Contemplates the Existence of Ghosts”: The title of this poem is taken from the title of an excerpt found in *The Penguin Book of the Undead*, in which Pliny the Younger, nephew of Pliny the Elder, recounts several ghost stories he has heard in a letter to his contemporary, the historian Tacitus. After the Roman emperor Domitian was assassinated, Pliny the Younger was accused of participating in the conspiracy so he left to become governor of a province on the Black Sea.

“How to Hide A Body”: A moderately popular self-published mystery novelist was accused in 2018 of murdering her husband. On her personal blog, a post titled “How to Murder Your Husband” was found and submitted in evidence against her.

“In The Year 671”: The first line of this poem was also taken from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

“In The Year 744”: Again, the first line is from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

“Whether Holy Scripture Should Use Metaphor?” The title of this poem comes from a question posed in Thomas Aquinas’ magnum opus *Summa Theologica*.

“In The Year 1030”: Once more, the first line was taken from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

“UFO CHILLER— DID THEY SEIZE THE COUPLE?” The title is derived from a real newspaper article written about Barney and Betty Hill in 1965. The date and writer’s name are all historically accurate, however, the text of the article is of my own creation.

“The Apple-Smellers”: A so-called “Monstrous Race,” the Apple-Smellers are described in Pliny the Elder’s writings about the peoples of the world. They supposedly lived near modern-day Georgia and Armenia. They wore apples on their hips, had no mouths, and so subsided on the smell of the apples instead.

“Climbing Clear Up to the Sky” is a line from the first verse of the song “Oh, What A Beautiful Morning,” from the musical *Oklahoma!* written by Rodgers and Hammerstein.

“Close Encounter of the Fourth Kind”: UFO believers have developed a system for categorizing the levels of interactions you can have with extraterrestrials. A Close Encounter of the First Kind is a sighting of a UFO. A Close Encounter of the Second Kind necessitates some physical effect of the UFO, such as time slowing down, electronic equipment malfunctioning, etc. A Close Encounter of the Third Kind is an interaction with an actual alien being (hence the Spielberg movie title). Lastly, a Close Encounter of the Fourth Kind is when an individual is abducted by aliens for a short while, either taken upon their spaceship or even back to their planet, before being returned, usually unharmed.

“The Robe of Merlin”: The book *The Interrupted Journey* (1965), written by John Fuller, was the main source for this sequence of poems about Barney and Betty Hill. John Fuller, a ufologist, was given permission by the Hills to write the story of their encounter. The epigraph to this poem is taken from the introduction the Hill’s psychiatrist, Dr. Benjamin Simon, wrote defending the practice of hypnosis while at the same time distancing himself from the UFO speculation.

“Hypnosis Session”: This poem takes several lines, mostly the italicized ones, from the transcripts of the hypnosis sessions Barney Hill underwent as part of his treatment for ulcers and some psychological distress. These transcripts can be found in *The Interrupted Journey*.

“The Green Children of Woolpit”: A medieval story found in the *UFO Encyclopedia*. Most likely a real folktale that UFO enthusiasts have seized upon because of its mention of green skin. Another theory is that the Earth itself is hollow, and the people who live inside the Earth are technically aliens, and this story serves as proof that they sometimes make it to the surface. While that explanation remains fairly far-fetched, a more reasonable explanation is that many Flemish people lived in England in the 1100-1200s and were fairly isolated from the outside world, raising their children to only speak Flemish. Oftentimes these children, because of poor economic conditions, would be malnourished, with pale or mildly green skin.