

*(Poems below taken from Illustrating the machine that make the world: From J.G. Heck's 1851 Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science, Virginia Quarterly Review/University of Georgia Press Contemporary Poets Series, date TBA)*

**Illustrating the illustrators**

*[See Plate 123, Fig. 46-47]*

When we wrote the name that we were told

was ours, the name that contained all

we would be given and all that would be lost,

there was a pleasure in the small, exact

movements of our hands, the pencil a machine,

worshipped, and that was where it began.

We said *Let us be children together,*

and we drew our lives before the body.

We drew the coal-quay whores with wooden legs,

the tow-horses asleep against the fog. Even dusk

flooded a whole new darkness, a sympathetic ink.

We said *If death is like this then give us more.*

**Illustrating the theory of twilight**

[Plate 6, Fig. 22. See also Plate 173, Fig. 54]

*At twilight you do what you can, which is almost nothing.*

-J. Anderson

Down in the reeds, farthest from God,

where the vultures wash their feet,

is where I slept the night the dogs found

the wild boar, half-dead from a cancer,

and brought its head back to the yards.

I could not take it from them.

They were wild with its blood,

as if they had seen the one true vision

of light that comes after an animal

is slaughtered in its sickness.

This is what I call the visible evidence

of the soul and do not try to convince me

that God has his way with us.

I once saw vultures living in a house,

in the cupboards, in the walls.

I came upon them along a creek,

the house abandoned for years,

trees growing through its rooms,  
jars still on the pantry shelves,  
the smell of leaves long dead and rot  
in the guts of its floors.

Three vultures rose through the ruin,  
casual, lazy days in the intestines  
and in the spirit and in the creek's own mind.

How can I go back to my life with the gaze  
of those birds upon me? I refuse to say

I saw God in their faces, the gauze of twilight  
around me told me this, and I believe it.

The dogs were waiting at the creek edge

and I saw myself in their movements,  
in the way they waited on every turn of my wrist.  
Pity is not a word I would use, but what animal

is this that cannot live without a man to tell it *death is close,*

*stay near, do not leave me, you are all I have.*

**Illustrating the echo in arched rooms**

[Plate 19, Fig. 92]

*-What is it, sir? We give up.*

*-The fox burying his grandmother under a hollybush.*

-J. Joyce

The fox is not a bird, and cries like a goose trying on a shirt.

All those buttons were not made for paws.

*A bird is an animal with an inside and an outside.*

*Remove the outside, there's the inside.*

*Remove the inside and you see the soul.* Remove the fox

and there is a quiet unlike any twilight you have heard.

Remove the crown of light above the fox's head, and nothing

will be the same again, not for you, for your family,

for your village and its one path to the river where spiders

draw maps three-fold in sand, there under the trees

where the foxes rest, deep inside the arched rooms of their dens.

Who would believe that three sleeping foxes make the sound

of barges at anchor, pine bows rubbing in the harbor dark,

in the acres of undoing? Who would believe that one of them is mine?

## ***From Illustrating the 13 transits of Mercury in the 19th century***

### *Mercury asleep against a blue-ribbon goat*

And everyone a witness of the buried years, of the animal's flesh, all animals the living island, the only ones under the trees. Our ancestor with the crippled wrist gave us light, and our goat ate clover softest from the hand.

### *Mercury asleep with the whippoorwill*

The living darkneses of nests in the garden, snake-paths through the straw, I know in myself that call, dense where the landscapes line themselves up, emerging throughout the weeds. Where the ghost lamb stood, night came from the ground.

### *Mercury asleep in the retreat of lost armies*

The clear water that appeared in craters after the cannons fell, after the enemy said *I've never seen snow before*, froze, and we drank nothing. Through the ice, we could see black fish mouthing at us, so we cut holes for them to visit, took them for our wives. *This is a new world*, we said. *Farewell to the other*.

### *Mercury asleep again on the illustration of the metal tongue* [See Plate 19, Fig. 95]

There are geese in the sky tonight, alone in their snow. I can hear their metal tongues, calling to that unknown season, over the houses, the harvested streets. In the innumerable world, in the brave ghost kingdom, there are many ways to live, and this is one of them.

**Appendix: the illustrators**

we  
contained all  
lost  
pleasure , exact  
machine,  
and began  
*together,*  
our lives the  
coal-quay  
fog. Even  
ink  
*is like this* .

Appendix: the snow

Mother's  
glacial  
rooms,  
graceless  
closet,  
consumptive  
of someone's  
curled up knives.  
We're  
minnows  
creaking  
the hollow  
cradle:  
*little*  
barren  
solitude,  
our lips  
Our god  
Our sin  
our sores.  
Whatever I want :  
I give .