

Periplum *and other poems*

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Also by Peter Gizzi

Some Values of Landscape and Weather (Wesleyan, 2003)

Artificial Heart (Burning Deck, 1998)

Periplum
and other poems

1987–1992

PETER GIZZI



CAMBRIDGE

PUBLISHED BY SALT PUBLISHING
PO Box 937, Great Wilbraham, Cambridge PDO CB1 5JX United Kingdom
PO Box 202, Applecross, Western Australia 6153

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First published by Avec Books, 1992
Second edition, 2004

Printed and bound in the United Kingdom by Lightning Source

Typeset in Swift 9.5 / 13

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ISBN 1 84471 073 4 paperback

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Acknowledgements

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the editors of the following journals in which these poems first appeared: *Avec*, *Cathay*, *Clerestory*, *Conjunctions*, *Dark Ages Clasp the Daisy Root*, *Five Fingers Review*, *Grand Street*, *The Impercipient*, *Le cahier du refuge*, *New American Writing*, *o•blēk*, *The Painted Bride Quarterly*, *Screens & Tasted Parallels*, *Talisman*, *Tyounyi*, and *Up Rising*.

Thanks also to the editors of the following anthologies in which some of these poems appeared: "Mahler's 2nd," *Broadway 2*, edited by James Schuyler and Charles North, New York: Hanging Loose Press, 1989; "Compline," On CD-ROM, read by Thomas Dolby, *The Invisible Universe*, edited by Fiorella Terenzi, New York: Janus Films/Voyager Press; "Poem for John Wieners," "News at Eleven," "Life Continues," "Deus Ex Machina," *An Anthology of New (American) Poets*, edited by Lisa Jarnot, Chris Stroffolino, and Leonard Schwartz, Jersey City: Talisman House, 1998; "Poem for John Wieners," *The Blind See Only this World*, edited by William Corbett, Michael Gizzi, and Joe Torra, Boston: Pressed Wafer, 2000.

Many thanks to the editors and presses where these works first appeared in book form: Cydney Chadwick for *Periplum*, Penn Grove: Avec Books, 1992. Gale Nelson for *Music for Films*, Providence: Paradigm Press, 1992. Manuel Brito for *Hours of the Book*, Gran Canaria: Zasterle Press, 1994.

The epigraph for the poem "Hard as Ash" is from an unattributed quote in Joan Retallack's essay "Non-Euclidean Narrative Combustion

(Or What the Subtitles Can't Say)," in *Conversant Essays: Contemporary Poets on Poetry*, ed. James McCorkle, Wayne State University Press, Detroit, 1990.

Music for Films takes its title from Brian Eno's compositions of the same name.

Thanks also to Eric Baus, Sueyeun Juliette Lee, Nick Moudry, and Rebecca Rosen for manuscript preparation.

I. Periplum

I cannot live with You –
It would be Life—
And Life is over there—
— EMILY DICKINSON

Orpheus was never really threatened by the Underworld during his visits there. In this poem they present him with a diplomatic note.
— JACK SPICER

Song of the Interior Begin

Some sky of hydraulic
spring Some season ever
So the tree for even
a twig O branch O earth

there is too (psalm)
Neither a pool nor
a crown And day spills
to where is O water

Begin! Begin! So sing
of lever Are eyes
shy? O iris O onyx
Into blouse of

Air go there !

Mahler's 2nd

In the beginning was the worm and the worm
turned to sod. It is the spring
that undoes winter which quilted is quiet
light building in solitary procession.
One block of lead after the other moving
in an endless array of grey tho humorless
is worn demurely which is the custom.

Only spring is listless myth. Myopic
ecstasy with nether earth, for a keepsake
is a rainy day a wishing well in afternoon.
A hand becoming an object portends a translation,
an artifact only dust will embrace intimately.
Say when does the phallus become a prick ?

The river moves. We are moved. This is
not uncommon our momentary communion with
house, mountain, water is all ours to transcend
as we arrive. This spring is chilled
awakening to touch these tendons
moving a darker reluctance into blossom.
Inescapable cant of the axis/heart.

Mise en Scène

Not knowing the name for something
proves nothing.

— JAMES SCHUYLER

The shortest distance between
two points is around the world,
and commerce is a word we can
appropriate to use here, but more
than this it is our achievement
of evening silence. A scarf
billowing, draped upon a door latch
in fragrant air. Vulnerable is
another word to attach to this
opening, a vivisection I fill
with eyelash teeth. Although
there was no piano to state the theme
there is music in our night space.
Breath making skin upon ribs taut.
That the formal alphabet of silence
(with or without a future) reveals
a language of the spine and sphinx
of wrists and ankles. Hair blue
black in china braids embellishes
this setting. In the book of my
archaeology your rib cage means
everything, because for years
absence has been my collarbone,
and I a sorry borderguard of this
sad state. Yes, an invisible X marks
the spot where you touch me,
right here, between wanting
and understanding between revelation
and the secret. This intersection
at the extremes of our walk.

Periplum

Put your map right with the world

The person who knows where
has made an accurate study

of here

As to know
implies a different reading

Somewhere

faith enters
and must be pinned and sighted

A church tower is good for reference
but losing ground

Still

satellites orbiting the earth
track a true arc

but perhaps too grand
for everyday distances

And never mind about the bewilderment

“I’m at sea”

The Locket

After the holiday the phone was
silent, and the deserted station.

When a face, static with grief,
looks beyond. Roll over.

Play dead. Try to forgive the
events that follow. To separate

this day and pure emotion
into office hours or a hot meal.

Finally to see that *W* written
across the horizon. Rising

above the houses as evening wore
on. Indelible. Winking out there.

And the wide shore just a hem
full with wind, or laughter, though

the food was good those days
in single file. In solemn rows.

Adding a new grave every seven
rods from the navel. In any

direction unable to distinguish a smile
from a scar. And this accounting.

News at Eleven

The treatment of the missing fare
will not account for absence
equated on the astrolabe of memory.
This in itself some achievement
of unnamed organs of discourse,
like a hippogriff in dreams
on wet lawns of Saturday eve
with Betty and Veronica, such pastel
impossibilities in adolescent moonlight.
Walking the boulevard through the years
you arrive always here about to depart
and going return for the lastings
and stayings of reflexive reveries.
Although time past will become a new
setting in the parlor, recalling
the light of a passing day's impression,
played severely upon the ceiling.
Night meditations of personal
adventure. So let's go back to
that sunlit beach or to rivers
and mountains if you prefer
a device, then one will be fashioned
to employ all the colors of that
faded photograph with what's his name
laughing so intently in the moment.
But it is precisely not that moment
with which you adhere, and tracking
the affect there is another event
with its own colors and agenda,
sounds from which your present gestures
are drawn to try with words, to infuse
a specific feeling, though displacement

follows your every so-called denouement.
So return to the glow of the television
and car horns outside
that startle only for an instant,
though the message is closer to
those sirens, the ones you wake
to in the periphery of sleep.
“One of our submarines is missing
tonight,” and to begin here
is a rope looking for an end.
Conclusion may be convenient
if not altogether catastrophic.
This report is inadequate,
no graph to illustrate a fear
escalating beyond, any rational
notion of belief, systems
to produce the intangible
dividend of change, an address
of one state to the next residence.
The house uncommon in its foundation
is set precariously out on a limb
or latest whim to inspire
a feeling of security, an operation
of trompe l’oeil employed at all the seams
to appear invisible.

Hierophant

Automatic is a sentence
from a past conversation
without a future

language is atmospheric
and a stone
thrown from the irrelevant

to the real

There is only this season
and the missing pomegranate seeds
the myth of childhood happiness
and water dreams
for the body is an instrument

Lost children are really not lost
in the woods
you come upon an enthusiast
her name is a labyrinth
she will affix petals to your lips
saying "bad magic is a false tooth
bearing bad blood to your heart."

no bramble of myrtle . . .

The lost child in the grimm forest
The body is a compass made of cork
and a pin floating in a glass bowl

The Creation

There are two rooms and a door

She is speaking a telling and a pause

There is the world known and otherwise

One room for paintings

Her story is a telling of the fall of water

Her story against theirs is

Here is where her telling lies

The painting of a woman preparing her toilet

This painting against a white field

Between these rooms a history

We walked the hill in autumn

She gave me her hand we looked at the building

Food took place between the rooms and our walk

Intervals for food for walks for paintings

Her story was a telling against the sky

Her telling is where my story lies

The painting was not a story

The painting was not a telling and a pause

The painting was and is for now

Her story was now and now here

Food was introduced as the control

There are two things then three certainly more

Simultaneous history is telling

The breath and beat of the thing

The thing being a history of this world

Between the walks and door