

Dereck Clemons

Wormholes 1: Figuring In the Light

He is at the edge of it. Along the lip
of the cup in his lap he runs his finger.
His face hangs
at the T.V. Smiling animated
bubbles
zip inside a
toilet as his thoughts float
to the car parked outside his house a week now.

A boy once was stuffed into the trunk
of a car outside his house.
The kid in the driver's seat mimicked
the kid in the trunk by clenching his jaw. By widening his eyes.
Their pupils dilated.
He stares at this car and rubs his ear.

*

He's got to piss
so in the cold bathroom now he's pissing. His member's
plunked out his white thermals and dangles between his freezing fingers.
Piss noises drive away
the quiet morning and he gets a mind to play with himself
by writing and drawing on paper
and folding it
in terms of balance
in relation to the figure that came before it he'll have set before him
and so have a collection of creatures with long and short necks
and round and skinny bodies like gourds
and other vegetables. Like leafy plants. With pearly teeth.

*

Doused in red sunlight
furniture bleeds into the walls. Into his thinking
and the room around it.
His wife pulls a blanket over her shoulders.
He's holding the remote.
What's you, says the remote. Doing. Me?
Yeah. It says.
Well. I'm looking for sexy
somethings on T.V.
and finding nothing that gets the blood rising
I keep clicking the remote
while I
fidget. While my brain fidgets.
While a couple ideas fiddle with each
other to see what comes of it.
Like maybe they'll
lock legs
and make a baby.

And a gremlin comes out more worn than either part that made it.
Its face like paper being crumpled collapses
until it's got no face.
It lands on his shoulder and through its tangled limbs
it lifts its head toward the car parked outside the house. He wonders
who left it there.
All those empty driveways.
Theirs is the only one that's not clean
off-white pavement.
Being gravel.
Great driveways.
A nose sprouts above the gremlin's brow.
Its mouth is slit into its ear. Its eyes are pinpricks.
It mumbles something under its breath as it scoops his dandruff
and tosses it down his back.

*

The gremlin says but about this twilight. It leaks
through figures into landscapes and people.
Fissures. It's how you hear me:

I follow this pale light into you.
You're a good thing to tie this thinking you do to.
Tie your own thinking to it. Your brain. So:
The light and your mind leak into vessels
so their own squat bodies will
leak into landscapes. And so your
body outgrows its skin and bone structures
into light which can be folded
and balanced. Lines more than the paper you fold it by
hold the mind which climbs into structures. And so it finds
itself living in places it didn't know existed
until it was folded. The mind leaks into them. The figures fold into it.

*

In finding a figure to get the flaps
of the brain to cross themselves
a form is built that holds itself together
when even much of the brain is concerned with
pressure building in the bladder
and soap scum. It becomes a movement the brain
falls into incorporating concerns into its moving
so suddenly it
appears opposite the object and does with it
what it will. Consume. Repulse. Use its energy to the brain's ends.
A martial art for traveling this leaky universe
of puddles and people. Thinking like a fluid thing.
So with this way of folded paper. They're available
points of entry and exit. The twilight and the car parked in it.

*

He turns from the car to his wife. She's pulled her feet up on the couch.
She pulls her hair back.

His leg jumps. The shivers come. The shakes.

Wormholes 2: Compressing Grasses

This lump is a hermit curled up. He squeezes
his brain like a bag of winds
and flies to his body. He turns his head
to the bird perched on the overhang over him
and says so you've come to my shack to shit on me.
My blankets.
You know that's why I'm wearing these.

The hermit looks at his stomach,
says the collusion
of landscapes and light both in the brain
and out
draws a bird
from the lining
of my stomach. It drops from the sky to the shack
to the grasses.

He gets up, his knees pop. The blankets
slip off. He leans back, his spine pops.
He wipes his hands on his tunic.

He sets water to boil, adds leaves, flowers
and stares at the kettle. His light leaks into it.
He walks into the field and squats.

Though at first it seemed constricting
he lives in the seam between waking and wakefulness. He's left
sleep for another life. Though in this one he still shits.
He compresses his gut.

The bird shoots out the grasses
and settles at his feet.
Its face slides to its neck.
A gremlin gave me this body, the bird says. It spread across
a blanket its instruments and pricked
my arm. My light dribbled into a chalice.
You know it's all such unnecessary business
for leaving bodies

but to stealing a portion of a person essential.
It drank and grew stronger.
And lives longer.

I was a gremlin once, the hermit says.
In another life.
But see now there is a gleam of anger
in your eye. It's no surprise you're
come to me.

*

He sets a cup to the ground and the bird drinks it.
Whiskey, it says. It spits.
Oh, says the hermit. I know. About that.

The bird tips over. The hermit eats its head.
He shoots into its body.

*

I'm getting hold of you
good vessel
to shuttle me into bathrooms. Door frames. A driveway.
A woman. A wormhole. Through you
I move as these figures pull together.

*

He sees he's sprawled on a couch before a big window.
Beside him a woman plays with a cat. He glimpses a figure
in which he says I know. In which he drinks with himself.

*

His mind is compressed into more than itself.
Into more of itself. More than matter dribbling
through the universe. It thinks. His mind is compressed
– he comes to – into a figure. He leaks into a kettle.
A bird settles at his feet. He comes to
staring out a window at a stranger's car parked on the street.

More than a week now. His eyes shift. The window sinks.

Wormholes 3: Ridgeway

He remembers being dragged from the trunk
and smashing his face in the street. He remembers being
unable to drive away fast enough. Speeding across town.
Rolling with the lights off into his driveway.
God. But yes, the gremlin says.
An eyeball sits in a corner of its mouth. You'd have it go that way.
You'd have them screaming and running out of dope houses.

Wormholes 4: Wormhole Lady

You just came through there. He points to the hole
burned in the wallpaper.
She smooths her skirt
and runs her fingers through her hair.

She flourishes a hand. A gratuitous amount of energy
bursts from her head.
She falls into the coffee table.
Quits moving.

I came in a bird through the deep, she says,
and dropped into this living room of dimming light.
Into this woman.
I leak through the universe as part of one person
pulls into another forming a figure a fellow can get into.
Here's one in you lady. Being this lady
with this thinking and speaking figure out there
now in here. Now you. It moves you into a figure.
Then another. You do. In you. You find you
are the one moving through you. Then the fellow. The back of his head
is opening. So there too. There already
and already now speaking and flinging its voice out.

My wife's lips
though they move I don't think that's her speaking.
I'm leaning next to her limp body
with my hands in her hair and what I speak
she speaks it. My own lips don't seem to be working.

Kneeling now
I'm realizing my scalp
is burned and sticky. I told you that already, she says.
You shot through the wall
into your skull. Or I did. Into mine.

Dereck Clemons graduated from The Iowa Writers' Workshop in 2006. His poems have received awards from The Academy of American Poets and the Workshop's John Logan Contest. He lives with his wife Wendy Trevino in Davis, California.