



Malachi Black

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O let me rise
As larks, harmoniously,
And sing this day thy victories:
Then shall the fall further the flight in me.

—*George Herbert*

Quarantine

Lauds

Somehow I am sturdier, more shore
than sea-spray as I thicken through
the bedroom door. I gleam of sickness.
You give me morning, Lord, as you
give earthquake to all architecture.
I can forget.

 You put that sugar
in the melon's breath, and it is wet
with what you are. (I, too, ferment.)
You rub the hum and simple warmth
of summer from afar into the hips
of insects and of everything.
I can forget.

 And like the sea,
one more machine without a memory,
I don't believe that you made me.

Prime

I don't believe that you made me
into this tremolo of hands,
this fever, this flat-footed dance
of tendons and the drapery

of skin along a skeleton.
I am that I am: a brittle
ribcage and the hummingbird
of breath that flickers in it.

Incrementally, I stand:
in me are eons and the cramp
of endless ancestry.

Sun is in the leaves again.
I think I see you in the wind
but then I think I see the wind.

Tère

But then I think I see the wind
as an intention, pressing us
with weather. All the pieces
of the air you've put together
somehow know just how to hold
the rain. They somehow know

to funnel and unfold, to swerve
the snow, to rake the beaches
and to slope the arcing seagull's wings.
As wind inside a shell: they know
you in themselves. I'll find you out;
I can know you as a hint in things.

I do. And through the window
I have known you as an opening.

Sext

I have known you as an opening
of curtains as a light blurts through
the sky. But this is afternoon
and afternoon is not the time

to hunt you with the hot globe
of a human eye. So I fluster
like a crooked broom in rounds
within the living room, and try
to lift an ear to you. I try.

I cut myself into a cave for you.
To be a trilling blindness
in the infinite vibration
of your murmuring July,
I cut myself into a cave for you.

None

I cut myself into a cave for you,
but you are quiet. You are shy:

an only child, you still hide
from blame and invitations

and you constantly deny
all suitors. I will not be

defied: *you* are the tongue
I plunge into this begging

razorblade so brightened
by my spiderweb of blood,

you are the one: you are
the venom in the serpent

I have tried not to become,
my Lord. You are the one.

Vespers

My Lord, you are the one:
your breath has blown away
the visionary sun
and now suffocates the skyline
with a dusk. If only once,
I wish that you could shudder
with my pulse, double over
and convulse on the stitches
in the skin that I slash wishes in.

But, Lord, you are the gulf
between the hoped-for
and the happening:
You've won. So what is left for me
when what is left for me has come?

Compline

when what is left for me has come:
when what is left has left its wing
in something slumped against a door:
when what is left for me has come
to nothing ever after and before
this kingdom come to nothing:
when what has come is nothing more
than what was left and what was left
is nothing more than what has come
to nothing ever after and before:
if what is left is what is meant
for me and what is meant for me
is nothing come to nothing come
to this kingdom come to nothing:

Nocturne

To This Kingdom Come to Nothing:

I have itemized the night. I have held
within the livid tissue of my mouth
every particle of light and even now
I am a maze of radiation. I have felt
in each of my one hundred trillion cells
the rapturous, proud swell of darkling sounds
whose undulations break a body down
to sprays of elemental matter. As well
I have obtained a straightforward account
of the forces and conditions that propelled
the universe to burst from nothing else
and I can tell of every trembling genesis.

There is no end,

What Has Come
Will Come Again

Vigils

There is no end: what has come will come again
will come again: and then distend: and then
and then: and then again: there is no end

to origin and and: there is again
and born again: there is the forming and:
the midnight curling into morning and

the glory and again: there is no end:
there is the blessing in an and and an again:
the limitlessly yessing of began

begins incessantly again: and then
the infinite undressing of all when
there is the lifting everything again

the glowing endlessness and then
the floating endlessly again

Matins

The floating endlessly again:
the glowing and the growing back
again as I am as I can and I can stand.
I understand.

 Though I am fashioned
in the haggard image of a man,
I am an atom of the aperture.

I am as a nerve inside a gland.

I understand. Though I am fashioned
as I am, I am a perch for the eternal
and a purse for what it lends.
I understand.

 Though flakes of fire
overwhelm the fallen snow, though ice
caps melt, though oceans freeze or overflow,
somehow I am sturdier, more sure.

Finis.

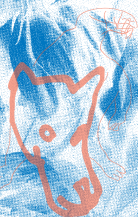
Author's Note

Quarantine is a poem to the possibility of God. Cast as a crown of sonnets in the tradition of John Donne's "La Corona," the ten movements of *Quarantine* derive their logic and arrangement from the Christian monastic prayer cycle known generally as the canonical hours ("horae canonicae"), while condensing the traditional quarantine period of forty days and forty nights into the passage of one day. The cycle draws from an assembly of contemporary and historical Catholic, Coptic, and Eastern Orthodox monastic traditions, such that each of the poem's ten prayers corresponds to a different Biblical event or religious consideration. The work begins with "Lauds," the Dawn Prayer, which is executed "in the watches" of the night (cf. Ps. 119:148) at dawn or predawn (3 a.m.), and praises God upon the rising of the sun. It is followed by "Prime," the Early Morning Prayer or First Hour (6 a.m.), which commemorates the Creation, the banishment from Eden, and the appearance of Jesus before Caiaphus (cf. Matt. 26:57-66). "Terce," the Mid-Morning Prayer or Third Hour (9 a.m.), is associated with the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:1-4); "Sext," the Sixth Hour or Midday Prayer (12 p.m.), with the Crucifixion (cf. Matt. 27:31-43); and "None," the Ninth Hour or Mid-Afternoon Prayer (3 p.m.) with the death of Jesus (cf. Matt. 27:45-52). Performed at sunset or upon "the lighting of the lamps," "Vespers," the Eleventh Hour or Evening Prayer (6 p.m.), is a meditation on the "Light" of Christ, while "Compline," the Twelfth Hour or Night Prayer (9 p.m.) is a contemplation of death, "our final falling asleep." The Night or Midnight Hour (12 a.m.), alternately called "Nocturne," "Vigils" or "Matins," consists of three watches corresponding to the three stages of Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane (cf. Matt. 26:36-44).

About the Author

Malachi Black is the author of the poetry collection *Storm Toward Morning*, forthcoming from Copper Canyon Press, and the limited-edition chapbook *Echolocation* (Float Press, 2010). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Poetry*, *Boston Review*, *The Iowa Review*, *Harvard Review*, *Blackbird*, and *Verse Daily*, among other journals, and in several recent and forthcoming anthologies, including *The Yale Anthology of the Devotional Lyric*, *Discoveries: New Writing from The Iowa Review*, and *Poems of Devotion*. The recipient of a 2009 Ruth Lilly Fellowship (awarded by the Poetry Foundation in conjunction with *Poetry* magazine), Black has also received recent fellowships and awards from the Bread Loaf Writers' Conference, the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, the MacDowell Colony, the Sewanee Writers' Conference, and the University of Texas at Austin's Michener Center for Writers, where he earned his MFA. A Vice Presidential Fellow at the University of Utah, Black was the subject of an Emerging Poet profile by Mark Jarman in the Fall 2011 issue of the Academy of American Poets' *American Poet* magazine.





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