

# RANDOM UNIVERSE

## *Día de la Asunción, San Miguel de Allende*

She leaves in the middle of August when  
squash and their blossoms are sold in the streets,  
and in the *mercado*, pomegranates are opened  
and divided into stars. She rises over  
the excrement of dogs on the sidewalks  
and rain funneled into the trough of the narrow  
brown stream. She is lifted above the flat  
rooftops studded with gas tanks and hung  
with laundry. She ascends with the smoke clouds  
of fireworks and the fragrance of corn  
cooking over charcoal, leaving  
behind her curious story: the stranger  
with blue and scarlet wings, the night  
journey through the desert, the child  
mysteriously given and mysteriously taken  
away. See how she floats slowly up  
through the bell-shaken air, our Mother,  
carrying roses. Soon she will rise  
over rings of volcanoes and fields  
of banana trees and the sea lumpy  
with whales. Already, the hem of her blue  
robe is hard to make out against  
the shocking blue sky. Now all we can see  
are the soles of her small, sandaled feet,  
shedding the clay-colored dust of the earth.

## *Blake's Garden*

William saw angels in the trees, large ones,  
writing in their books, their wings almost scraping  
on the ground, their lustrous hair falling in their eyes  
as they traced glowing letters on the page, taking notes  
on greengages and vegetable marrows and aubergines,  
surrounded by a strange perfume like lilies  
mixed with pepper and the faintest whiff of sandalwood,  
encircled by auras of sacred fire like fog burning off water,  
as the sun beamed down on William Blake and his small garden,  
where snails slept under the nasturtiums  
and foxgloves stood like flaming swords  
lighted by God's hand.

*At Large in the Random Universe*

The fat, silver, libidinous tuba took wing  
in a purple purgatory, where the far-reaching clouds  
were clabbered, and a terrible, gelid nimbus  
like a halo of strawberry Jell-O surrounded the sun.  
Meanwhile, a poky bunny was trying to cross the freeway  
and ribbeting frogs were enduring wedding bells;  
the geese and goldfish ate as much as they could, hoping  
for more, and in the darkness of Paris, a hail of stamens  
fell over the gelatos and espressos and café mochas  
to swim in the chocolate glaze of small cakes  
and slowly sink in the florid teacups.

Then the half-naked dandelions began to dance,  
without shoes or camisoles or crinolines, wearing only  
their golden taffeta skirts and their peppery perfume,  
while the irises sighed like royalty, the bougainvillea  
trembled in its phantom paradise, and azaleas  
floated in the sexy grandmother's curly hair.

Somewhere a tiger is slinking westward,  
waiting to run, as the snowy owl waits in his turret for  
the forgetful mouse in the straw. I remember caresses,  
fidgeting fingers, that peculiar time on the rug, the mask—  
but I would rather forget the tapestries we chose,  
the dross that intensifies and turns to ashes,  
the mumbling of blond, embittered Hamlet.

Yet still I hear the waterwheel, the slapping  
and coughing and snarling of the flux

we dwell in, in this grungy theater damned by degrees  
and cracked like Spode, this college of disease  
where we are leashed to process, though we would rather  
shatter our glasses like gypsies and sashay through the trash.

Instead we are twisted like Gumby, riveted by  
unsettling leaches, those bloodsuckers that hurt us  
like scissors or table saws, that torture us  
with tongs and chopsticks until our eyeballs burst like pods.  
While I want only to wear lace and a choker of pearls  
and to eat Bayonne ham on a doily, forgetting  
the icepicks, gulping my bread, deaf to the world  
and its crowded cornucopia.

## *Mistranslator's Song*

*A mistranslation of a poem by Milosz*

In the fucking wind, in a cold land,  
I was ashamed of my wacky chairs. Ducks sang  
and clung to my gams while the sun crooned and flamed.

This is the realm of old lids, of singing aunts,  
of the flaring and caroling sun, and  
wee wood hens going *cluck, cluck, cluck*.

I have come to the land of death, of love and lust and Freud,  
where a man could find himself going into woods  
that are growing endlessly wilder.

The murderous toadies of war are gathering here in shame,  
while I rack my head for an answer and  
the old sun flares and flames.

## *Aria*

Nothing is so beautiful as the ground  
of being. And though the possible too  
is beautiful, for it is the engine of desire, nothing  
is so beautiful as the real, like unexpected flowers  
on the doorstep: fragrant, fragile, marked for death,  
unfolding moment by moment, lighting the room,  
lingering in the mind long after they have faded.

The lushness of meaning rose to its height in summer,  
festooned with lilies and snapdragons, bouqueted  
with leaves and the tiny white flowers  
that turn into beggar's lice. I picked bunch after  
bunch and brought them back for my mother's dining  
table, where they dropped showers of petals and stamens  
and pistils, leaf hairs and insects and pollen, seed  
pods and leaves, dirt and dust and drops of sap.

The green paths of the world keep calling, edged with poison  
oak and wild asparagus, crumbled with broken rock  
and trampled herbs. So time extends. The past grows deep  
and rich; the future moves toward me, cruel and bounteous,  
like the sea.

## *In the White Rooms*

*The panoramic range of subjects and areas of emotion mapped out by Twombly's reduced means—reaching from atonal barrenness to grand opera . . . reconfirm the possibility that art can pull the fullness of the world back in through portals of the most stringent simplicity.*

—Kirk Varnedoe, *Cy Twombly: A Retrospective*

Random and nonrandom frenzy and boredom and obsessive  
blossoms of paint, penises, roses, whirlpools, joy  
distributed at random and nonrandom over the white  
canvases, big as walls, almost floating, detached  
from the white walls in the light-filled rooms. Edgy  
energy, offhand elegance, joy in freedom  
and wildness, fullness and stillness, the void  
and the nonvoid, love of the line and how it is  
deliberate and nondeliberate, floating and anchored,  
embedded in the path of the brush, in the viscous,  
shiny, chewy tracks of paint, the skittery, spidery graphite  
scribbles and crayon scrawls, faded graffiti and shards  
of meaning, luminous smears, ecstatic streaks  
and globs of crimson, the trace of the fingers and mark  
of the hand, the weave of the cloth emerging and submerging,  
veils of color shifting, furious spirals, cannons  
and death boats, and Leda consumed in explosions  
of feathers, the ocean advancing and falling back, Ilium  
burning, Achilles in agony, Leander lost  
under the wave, blue water deepening, light floating back  
behind lost words and slash marks and scraps  
of poems, Rumi dancing, summer dripping in streams  
of pollen, efflorescence and excrescence, delight  
in color and noncolor, play and nonplay, wit

and silliness, so much to say that it can't be said  
fast enough, emptiness and the dance of making,  
jazzy beauty and sheer effrontery, and a wild  
kind of hope that the act of creation will save us all.

## Les Choses

*Close attention to things may make them seem strange.*

—Jean Follain, from *A World Rich in Anniversaries*

Things may be larger than they appear. They may be more mottled, more distorted. They may be ungainly, or they may be supreme fulfillments of their ideal form. Some things may be hidden. Some may travel back and forth between the conscious and unconscious realms. Some may take a metaphoric leap; others, like grasshoppers or frogs, may take real leaps. Sometimes you may think that your life is sad and empty, yet at the same time crowded with unwanted and unneeded objects. Yet if you awake in the middle of the night, thinking about death or about how difficult living is, you may be comforted to be surrounded by them. Your paintings and your books and furniture, your adored cups and plates, the small keepsakes that were given to you or that once belonged to a loved one—even your kitchen appliances—all the things that you will someday leave behind are faithfully existing for you now; they are breathing quietly in and out in unison, keeping watch over you in the night.