

2708-12

# ACTION



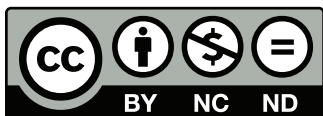
*[poems]*

Anthony Opal

ACTION

# ACTION

© Anthony Opal, 2014



<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/>

This work is Open Access, which means that you are free to copy, distribute, display, and perform the work as long as you clearly attribute the work to the authors, that you do not use this work for commercial gain in any form whatsoever, and that you in no way, alter, transform, or build upon the work outside of its normal use in academic scholarship without express permission of the author and the publisher of this volume. For any reuse or distribution, you must make clear to others the license terms of this work.

First published in 2014 by Peanut Books  
a literary offshoot of punctum books  
Brooklyn, NY  
<http://punctumbooks.com>

ISBN-13: 978-0692335543  
ISBN-10: 0692335544

Library of Congress Cataloging Data is available from  
the Library of Congress.

Cover Photo: *D.B. MacMillan*, 1910.  
George Grantham Bain Collection,  
Library of Congress.

Author photo by Mel Keiser.

I USED TO MAKE THE BIGGEST FEASTS FOR NOBODY.

-L.O.



Peanut Books | Brooklyn, NY

# ACTION

[*poems*]

Anthony Opal

# CONTENTS

10	ACTION
11	SLAVE
12	THE CITRUS-BIRD PROBLEM
13	EXODUS ETC
14	SMALL GOD
15	BACK ROADS AND WORM HOLES
16	LIST
17	MECHANICAL SUNFLOWER
18	KING DAVID
19	THE WAY YOUR T-SHIRT HUNG
20	COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN
21	SCRAWLED LIKE A FILEFISH
22	THE COYOTE
23	YOUR BEST OWL SUIT
24	ENTERING THE WATER WITHOUT LOOKING
25	NO SNOW IN THE JUNGLE
26	HALLELUJAH TO PORNOGRAPHIC COLLAGE
27	THE WING'S BODY
28	GOOD MORNING
29	WAKING UP TO SNOW
30	JOHN CAGE

- 31 | HALF A BIRD MASK
- 32 | INVISIBLE PLANE
- 33 | VARIETIES OF WAR
- 34 | STAY
- 35 | GOLDEN CITY
- 36 | "FRESH AIR YOU ARE AN ART STUDENT"
- 37 | THAT OF THE PHARISEES
- 38 | MOBILE ENOUGH
- 39 | CATHEDRAL
- 40 | NO SMALL PREMONITIONS
- 41 | AS YOUR VOICE IS A BOTTLE ROCKET
- 42 | FIGMENT LIKE A FRAGMENT
- 43 | "I LAUNCHED A BOAT FRAIL AS A BUTTERFLY"
- 44 | ALBINO PEAPOD
- 45 | VODKA IN THE SHOWER
- 46 | THE BEAST
- 47 | THROUGH A MUTED TRUMPET
- 48 | OF COURSE THE DRUMS
- 49 | HIPPOPOTAMUS
- 50 | THAT WHICH POINTS AWAY
- 51 | GLITTER-BOMB HALLELUJAH
- 52 | A SMALL HILL LIKE A SMALL MOSES
- 53 | MORE NAKED THAN EVER DRESSED
- 54 | SON OF HOW WAVES ARE SPUN



- 55 | LIKE A TORTOISE-SHELL HAIR-CLIP
- 56 | ELECTRICITY FOR THE SYMPHONY
- 57 | ST FRANCIS AT THE WEDDING
- 58 | THE WHOLE GARDEN
- 59 | OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND
- 60 | UNFOLDING THE NAPKIN
- 61 | NOTIONS OF LOVE
- 62 | WARMER WEATHER
- 63 | TO LAUGH WILDLY AT HORSE AND RIDER
- 64 | FROM THE MOUTH OF GABRIEL
- 65 | SOLA SCRIPTURA
- 66 | BY THE OTHER SIDE
- 67 | THE LIONS ARE PACING

ACTION

# ACTION

dear god-and-a-half dear action painter  
dear compassionate sloth and hammerhead  
shark who willingly gave up the hammer  
dear directionless each and every  
direction at once dear homeless zoo  
keeper dark inverted sun and broke-  
winged finch healed-winged falcon dear  
surprising January rain running  
quickly from rooftops like prophets' voices  
in the wind which brought it to them  
not beyond infection or cancer or  
arthritis or fevers or doubt but rather  
those unseen jet streams howling throughout  
the land to break things up again

# SLAVE

I take my medication and then fall  
in love with a gull the holy slob  
that I am its toes dug into the sand  
and the other gulls held up by strings  
though nothing casts a shadow anymore  
on a day like this I want to sing  
a song to myself in the silence of  
myself something like “dearest bird you are  
too much for me to handle I’m not  
worthy to untie the thong of your sandal”  
and then to imagine this gull wearing  
sandals and fall asleep for the first time  
happy due to the absurdity of  
the very grandeur of a mute being

# THE CITRUS-BIRD PROBLEM

only one bird breed lives in lemon trees  
until I Googled it and found out  
that many bird breeds live in lemon trees  
and that it's actually a problem  
people have keeping these birds out  
of their citrus the worst being the oranges  
but then I Googled that and it turns out  
the citrus-bird problem is universal  
and not a joking matter like last night  
when Jake made fun of Jean-Dominique  
Bauby by blinking his left eye  
and then regretted it or the time when  
I took too lightly the citrus-bird problem  
that we were having metaphorically

## EXODUS ETC

we hung our harps on the poplar trees  
growing left-leaning from the muddy banks  
of the river our captors demanded  
that we sing songs of G-d's good deeds  
and faithfulness in times of trouble I saw  
a dead bush burst into flames my mind  
reeling with hate for each stupid fish-mouth  
that came to the surface for air as if  
the river cared or the river was fair  
which is when Levi stared singing about  
the time Moses struck a rock with a stick  
and just couldn't get the water to stop

## SMALL GOD

and who am I to not slowly fashion  
a small god from the fingernail clippings  
of the girl I love Jackson Pollock of  
the body was an idea I had  
for a sculpture imagining if chaos  
were spatial like what happens when  
a word disappears into an object  
between us the vase of your shoulders or  
as André Breton put it better  
“my wife whose shoulders are champagne”  
and then to wake in the myriad mums  
(my pubic hair littered with mum pollen)  
to Adam’s excited utterance  
“oh bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh”

## BACK ROADS AND WORM HOLES

darkness and diphtheria mix with softness  
the shape of a brick-cornered  
building encompassing a map of West  
Africa (explaining this tit-for-tat  
and stray cat moaning as some suffering  
is just too much and the only way  
to get at it's by back roads and worm holes  
the removal of all things to make her  
say "okay okay I remember that")  
the firefly fat with light swarming inside  
the jar to make the center of the palm  
bright as the person carrying it I  
used to have so much to say before the rain  
carried me away and now it steers



# LIST

things I would miss upon leaving here  
frozen pasta referred to as “the nests”  
real sonnets by unreal prophets  
pale darkness of the morning our bed  
the silence therein noise of the fan  
waking in the middle of the night  
to take a piss without lights on stumbling  
back upstairs glimpsing the snow  
the nocturnal crow the possum digging  
in the compost bin the laughter of it  
inside myself and G-d still unresolved by  
hope in ecstasy the Fibonacci  
sequence coupled with this reality  
of strange mercy that pulls us inward

# MECHANICAL SUNFLOWER

“I hope like a hatchback bird at least  
some semblance of worship comes from these”  
was supposed to be the last couplet of  
this last poem but I couldn’t get there and  
so decided to start here (with what  
gratitude) as I walk through the hospital  
lobby and out into the parking lot  
leaving behind tubes of blood with  
my name on them address and birthday it’s  
all so odd how someday I’ll be just one  
petal on the mechanical sunflower  
which is why I think she keeps telling me  
that for some love leads to discipline  
and for others it’s the other way around

## KING DAVID

no longer allowed inside the temple  
I take pills in order to access  
the absent G-d shaped door a portico  
outside which I wait like King David  
at the back of a cave huddled and itching  
my chest from withdrawal while having  
the wherewithal to withstand it all  
I find myself cleaved from innocence  
and experience alike remaining alive  
solely to coincide with the hell of  
“we strive for five” around the corner  
where sunlight streaks the streets like water  
only more beautiful as sunlight  
is able to be displaced by a shadow

## THE WAY YOUR T-SHIRT HUNG

dreamt of you but not as a scholar I  
couldn't have dreamt anything kinder  
or more supple or gentler or smaller  
than the curves of an airplane window  
(the divot of your bellybutton becoming  
a universe to be flipped over like  
a cosmetic mirror one side magnified  
the other normal) as if it were you  
the wife of my youth of apple bearings  
and single trees the receding light  
plain-old-light inside a plane of light  
and how we love to fly I remember  
touching down in Sierra Leone the way  
your T-shirt hung in the humid air

# COMING DOWN THE MOUNTAIN

within the cold impersonal cleft  
of G-d in which Moses verily stood  
hearing a voice as in a sudden herd  
run off the edge of an eastern cliff  
to become a stolid solitary blip  
on the map a snapped tree's time zone  
and then to descend Sinai become old  
holding a cup up to deserted lips  
an angel wrenching a young man's hip  
long ago on the banks of the Jabbok  
Moses swings and strikes a rock  
cupping water up to deserted lips  
within the cold impersonal cleft of G-d  
the universe (musical atonal) skips

## SCRAWLED LIKE A FILEFISH

alas saying *Yes Yes* this is a good  
painting my dynamic crumpled horn is  
run into the ground even as my slow  
body is covered in layers of shirts  
and that's not all she too covers me  
when I'm sick and also when I'm not  
I feel her nipples where my fingers meet  
to become palms cupping a handful  
of hair and letting it fall against her  
back as sunlight felled by an axe  
on the cool bed in the afternoon I  
return to my painting with *Yes Yes*  
scrawled across the bottom of it like  
a filefish (the opposite of habit)

# THE COYOTE

I invite the coyote in and give him  
free reign of the interior space  
to redecorate my place in accordance  
with his tastes to which I can't relate  
yet am surprisingly excited at  
the prospect of hating the color scheme  
coyote chooses or the arrangement  
of the furniture the hanging artwork  
(though we both love Jackson Pollock  
and the violence inherent to those  
strokes that cross the other ones out)  
"I am nature" Pollock says coyote  
once told me to which I replied loudly  
"I know coyote I know I know"

## YOUR BEST OWL SUIT

stick to the image of the owl or the tall  
thin pine around the lake imagine  
that it was your home and that you were  
a collector of squirrel bones watching  
them fall end over end from unknown  
heights do you think this would change  
your views on religion or politics  
even though you would never be allowed  
to vote or attend a church service  
unless you listened from the bell tower  
or took communion from a rain puddle  
or punched the ballot with your beak you  
probably wouldn't care wouldn't put on  
your best owl suit wouldn't even own one



## ENTERING THE WATER WITHOUT LOOKING

scaffolding of a butterfly boat  
above ten darkly schooling syllables  
the body launches from its farthest shore  
experiencing all as one layer  
among others among the darkness of  
a half-dozen objects falling  
from our hands as we took off our pants  
and hung them from the branches  
entering the water without looking  
(an airplane passing overhead) it took us  
an hour to remember who we were and  
how water always appears clearest  
from above even though light angles in

# NO SNOW IN THE JUNGLE

a paper airplane made of fractals is  
thrown into the jungle or at least that's  
how it feels to be the jungle I mean  
a self-injection of Etanercept  
into either "the thigh or the stomach"  
is what the nurse says "but first make sure  
that the syringe is clear and doesn't  
look like a snow globe" which I suppose  
means that no snow is allowed in  
the jungle that it wouldn't survive  
there or accumulate on the jungle floor  
or the jungle vines or the jungle  
animals (who would surely die) so I  
warm it up and sterilize the spot twice

# HALLELUJAH TO PORNOGRAPHIC COLLAGE

geese collapse one after another  
into the suburban pond as thunder  
sounding a timpani in the distance  
rolls in past treble clef lemon trees  
with this or that disease I mean  
rheumatoid arthritis plus vaccines  
for arguing about whether or not  
revelation is a thing (so sing  
if you don't believe in music and cling  
if you don't believe in G-d) a firefly  
in the sermon on the mount's *Selah*  
hallelujah to pornographic collage  
rough sex turned into stained glass like  
a tall church in place of a roadmap

*\*2:00am, hospital, morphine*

## THE WING'S BODY

the materials of darkness are this  
crow's broken wing reflecting daylight  
through the middle of the kitchen where  
I'm sitting in a chair reclining deeper  
into the breast of the last supper  
until leaning forward for the first time  
in years as whose paternal twin I  
envision the lonely wing on the lawn  
the body somewhere else just sitting there  
it's me I think to myself I must be  
missing my left arm always have been  
though I'm lying as nothing is ever  
*always* so I'll just mourn for both of us  
and start tomorrow as the wing's body

## GOOD MORNING

bird beak like a rawhide bone remains  
enthroned in the orange flesh of a cantaloupe  
alongside the pill on the windowsill  
I presently take with a smallish lake  
of water pooled at the bottom of  
my cup that no longer runneth over  
in the morning but rather takes its time  
like the blue charcoal sunrise I find  
my mind somewhere else between the Pink  
Lady apple and the Earl Grey tea  
in a white ceramic mug layered steam  
like transient feathers falling in reverse  
to the sound of elevated trains in  
the distance I hear through open windows

## WAKING UP TO SNOW

I chase the furry animal until  
it ducks into a drainage ditch which  
is only me waking up from a dream  
the darkness held in spite of the daylight  
I've been told by those who claim  
to know the will of gods and devils  
oh G-d it sure is beautiful here  
waking up before the sun begins  
the morning pale as an unformed eye  
drinking green tea steeping it too long  
until it's bitter as hell I add some  
milk and honey to take the edge off  
realizing that *Christ* it snowed all night  
and that the pilot light blew out  
the moment that winter hit the garden

## JOHN CAGE

a fly is something that exploded  
and was put back together in the name  
of magnetism's fear or atonal  
music and so a fly is like John Cage  
or the sort of thing John Cage would sing  
if he sang (and he does sing) I mean  
secret things composed of a low hum  
in the shower or the car in mid-flight  
its vibrant wings exploding in the air  
in the middle of an open expanse like  
how on earth did I ever get here

## HALF A BIRD MASK

I wear an unfashionable bird mask  
to paint my portrait before the party  
as a child in a suit did I mention  
it's only half a mask and that my wife  
made it for me because I'm unhappy  
talking endlessly about poetry  
adjusting my stance to wrestle this  
angel at Penuel I break its wing  
as it dislocates my hip demanding  
to know my name to which I say "I  
am unfashionable I bathe in the  
water naked as the hour I was born"



## INVISIBLE PLANE

have you seen the hippo's mouth open  
wide its white teeth rise like skyscrapers  
from its black gums felt the weight of  
a small thing on top of you seen the northern  
lights how they shine like the skin  
of your thighs stepping from the shower  
and reaching for a towel did you see  
the green finch just before it hit the window  
how it looked like you just before you  
hit the window and by you I mean me before  
I hit the window that invisible plane  
that breaks the line and the man the same

## VARIETIES OF WAR

if suffering doesn't bring about  
resurrection the longing inherent  
to suffering will do it (intuit  
a spark a fire Christ nonexistent  
for three days not simply  
somewhere else in heaven or hell but  
in a cave behind a stone a body  
without the electricity of a soul  
empty zeros of nothingness being  
filled up by G-d knows what  
cold moments utterly void  
of love in the living room or kitchen  
the loneliness inherent to this  
haplessness of all varieties of war)

## STAY

“I want to be here” is the simplest  
form of praise I know the ozone levels  
are so high today I have a headache  
but love the slope of your breasts the way  
a bird swoops into the hole in the wall  
outside the kitchen window means  
we’re finally sharing a home I suppose  
I could’ve been more romantic instead  
of writing about those other bodies  
moving around me like yesterday I saw  
this shadow on the floor of the river as  
water was brooding dove-like above it

## GOLDEN CITY

daylight reconstructs the sign of Jonah  
in reverse as each tiny bird in its  
tiny hearse wakes up and forsakes  
its tiny wings for panes of light the size  
of Moby Dick unwounded no longer white  
as G-d laughs by the leaves of the trees  
they crash into each other with their  
new bodies and golden beaks which are  
meant to be a joke because gold is so  
damn ugly who would want a whole city  
made of it the cherubim ask sourly  
since it's their comedy routine to be  
miserable in this heaven-come-to-earth  
where G-d is nowhere to be seen because  
G-d has no skin and is too busy giving

## “FRESH AIR YOU ARE AN ART STUDENT”

attempting a landscape of the mind or  
at least that's what Jackson Pollock does with  
your sundress floating on the river's water  
it's taken away in an instant and  
this is what is meant by “they were naked  
and felt no shame” smelling of local  
rain acrylic paint and sweat like  
“fresh air you are an art student” which  
actually means you're a theologian  
a boat maker an animal lover  
a bird made of popsicle sticks that you  
yourself licked though with more compassion in  
your eyes than sensuality because  
this you said is the true nature of form

## THAT OF THE PHARISEES

snow falls from a foreboding syntax  
as night excuses itself with the flu  
and the dog from next door continues  
to bark things perpetually kept from me  
down Briar Cliff Street I hate the stars  
for their persistence and my lack of love  
“a dove is just a symbol” *but also*  
*just an animal* I say in response  
to metaphors I find doubtful at thirty  
trying to keep a first-time hunger  
about me as I walk through the snow  
wondering how my righteousness  
will ever exceed that of the Pharisees

## MOBILE ENOUGH

that G-d's a father how odd to picture  
being held back while nothing can  
and nothing is holding me Søren  
Kierkegaard wrote something like  
“at the moment of your deepest suffering  
try to relieve the suffering of  
others” which sounds impossible but isn't  
if one manages to stop writing  
poems (which may have already happened)  
in order to become a body without  
water remaining mobile enough to take  
walks around the lake in winter a constant  
reminder of the crater at the center

# CATHEDRAL

why not listen to Neutral Milk Hotel  
as a high school secretary I think  
injecting my belly with medication  
that refuses to work while writing  
these sonnets and taking attendance  
answering the phone again and again  
to talk with parents about their kids'  
delinquencies my father wrestling me  
down to the kitchen floor holding  
my head under the sink's water  
causing me to rise with the glory of  
a cathedral enabling me to be baptized  
at any moment throughout the day



## NO SMALL PREMONITIONS

painting from the thirteenth century  
of Eve being pulled from Adam's sleeping  
side how lovely you are in lies  
small body next to mine the sunlight  
streaking across the bedroom ceiling it's  
early in the morning and you're wearing  
a white tank top waking up to ask me  
if a bird just hit the window *no*  
I say *why* "because I thought I heard  
something sad" you say pushing your hair away  
from your face and going back to sleep  
leaving me to contemplate the greatness  
of a woman who lives mystically and inhabits  
the day with no small premonitions

# AS YOUR VOICE IS A BOTTLE ROCKET

hello skirmish of bright red fire ants you  
nervous bird-herd of the sky jackfruit  
painted tie the library leaning back  
heavy with ivy under crisscross jet streams  
of an empty Doritos bag floating by  
with such whimsy it breaks me into thirds  
a kind of doxology before this  
altar of fire even these streamers  
as your voice is a bottle rocket  
to me and to everything else simply  
a dog whistle (unbearable unhearable)  
on the outskirts of campus the prophet waits  
scribbling notes about the baby foxes  
born just beyond the threshold of the gate

## FIGMENT LIKE A FRAGMENT

sunlight in every city is different  
due to humidity and other  
various factors pollution the voices  
of children reflecting off buildings  
made of glass rumored to be eternal  
like the most violent storm the wind  
moving through the street like something  
near Galilee the fishermen see  
a figment like a fragment on the beach  
stoking a fire cooking fish Peter  
swims to it and the others follow  
like old times except Peter is naked  
and Jesus is newly resurrected

## “I LAUNCHED A BOAT FRAIL AS A BUTTERFLY”

the naked body my naked body  
rheumatoid arthritis and Tylenol  
3 my heart beats unseen waves of sunlight  
passing through the window next to me I think  
through a migraine as stained glass suffering  
is a kind of worship at least that's why  
I like birds so much so small that you  
carried one home in your mitten from  
the train it looked sickly and lost when  
we let it go and so I promised to make  
a bird feeder which I suppose will never  
happen now I just can't stop thinking about  
that Berrigan sonnet that ends with "sadness  
I launched a boat frail as a butterfly"

## ALBINO PEAPOD

“the dog’s the snow” they say in Sierra Leone  
after something such as a chicken or  
goat dies “bring it to the moon” they say  
hoisting its body up and away and past  
the womens’ breasts filled with night-light  
to the sound of music between them  
I stand as a foreigner an albino  
peapod sealed up altogether strange  
tracing the outline of a circle sketching  
a self-portrait with a wooden spoon  
on the clay hill where the radio station  
stands above the land somehow different when  
darkness lifts misunderstanding follows

## VODKA IN THE SHOWER

the happenstance of the parallax I  
hear a car alarm waking up while you're  
in the shower hearing nothing other  
than water over brightening freckles  
(have you read *Eugene Onegin* in  
translation) the branches entering the room  
without losing one leaf is what I mean  
about parading around nakedly  
in the morning's clean light "I should go"  
the moth says to the glass of vodka  
"no you should stay" the moth imagines  
the vodka saying while in reality  
there's nothing between the two except  
silence and sunlight littered with bees

# THE BEAST

the beast who chews the grass gets ahold  
of the grass with its blocks-for-teeth inside  
the loosely grated sieve of its mind  
finds the holy aircraft of the body  
sailing through time at a stupid speed  
divided by the speed of light in  
a street fight between watery brainwaves  
and words in a different language said  
to slain deer the bears that keeps them here  
for way too long the paper-light napkin  
collapsing the self into the self infinitely  
the shadows of fence posts continually  
holding up the grated sieve for the beast

# THROUGH A MUTED TRUMPET

passionless I watch the girls strut past  
in wool skirts as the business school  
lets out down the hall there's a stairwell  
I sleep in like an elephant with paper  
wings my mind sings through a muted  
trumpet its brassy malaise *hurray*  
I think to myself *I'm actually writing*  
*a poem today* though it's getting harder  
to row around this town's time zone  
without wanting to wash the beloved's  
hair in the river and then my own  
in a moment I'm the deer in the clearing  
I'm the hunter I'm the bullet firing



## OF COURSE THE DRUMS

walking to Fiona Apple's *The Idler*  
*Wheel is Wiser than the Driver of the Screw*  
*and Whipping Chords Will Serve You More*  
*than Ropes Will Ever Do* the evening's  
metal nets and bright bees are removed  
from shoreline to the trees where waves break  
against themselves like all-too-human  
saints unable to slap the sand back down  
and be drawn out into the seamless sea  
in reverie in Blake-light's last song-sound  
as jazz destroyed it all of course the drums  
hummed inside the house of the mammal  
where I find myself at the thigh of the lake  
a pantomime for the rib-hymn's sake

# HIPPOPOTAMUS

joyous G-d with a diphthong for a heart  
speaking guttural utterances  
and finding some soil to dig into  
calls man up like a whirlwind from the dust  
to name the animals and watch the rain  
from within the cleft of a sheltered plane  
like all that's real entering in  
to the room at once even the windows  
are unable to stay shut as the grass  
bows down in the eastern breeze it lies  
plastered to the ground laughing all the while  
“and what do you want to call this little  
cloud of dust” *a hippopotamus*  
Adam says jokingly though the name sticks

## THAT WHICH POINTS AWAY

I have a phantom-limb pain in my tooth  
as I walk past the Whole Foods where  
the suburbs exist the molar's removed  
and a new one's built in its place with  
the sudden architecture of a Spanish  
mountain mystic's chapel its catacombs  
where nerves used to be I see red  
brick buildings with dormant ivy climbing  
up the gutters and around the windows  
in a heliotrope's sun-shaped desire  
to continue walking instead of going  
home where I have so much to do but will  
do nothing or the other way around  
in light of that which points away from  
the dull persistent pain of what's missing

# GLITTER-BOMB HALLELUJAH

the slow depression of serotonin's  
recession before the resurrection  
of the heart's intention to continue  
like slow snow in the brain love comes  
to remind the body of the spirit's  
existence whether it's just a breath  
or an all out glitter-bomb of a soul  
doesn't really matter except that  
when I was dying I found myself  
alive washing dishes at the kitchen sink  
a god-anchor tied to my balloon string  
holding me there for the first time  
outside the house I grew up inside

## A SMALL HILL LIKE A SMALL MOSES

sunlight goes broke as your hand moves  
from your hair through the air to your side  
where it rests in perfect stasis balancing  
the silence inside each unit of sound  
obeying neither space nor time you find  
a stick on the ground and begin to climb  
a small hill like a small Moses though  
none of this is real and none of this is  
a dream really but rather the result of  
a waking vision like the motion of  
water following a boat and spreading out  
for hours until the shore on either side  
receives the tide in such a way that we  
speak of all things in terms of happenstance

## MORE NAKED THAN EVER DRESSED

moments when G-d's hollow she's a bowl  
of caesuras between the shifting snow  
flakes and flakes off the monochrome face  
choral music's evidence of silence  
allowing some snow to gather in her hair  
standing there under glass-bulbed Christmas lights  
the moon on fire the bottom of the flame  
becoming bluer and colder inverting  
the expected is quoted throughout winter  
in a language of behemoth footprints  
leading us closer to frozen forests  
under stars hazing our common sense  
the landscape more naked than ever dressed

## SON OF HOW WAVES ARE SPUN

my thoughts are the arc of your ponytail  
perfect and completely meaningless  
to the majority of the world  
allowing desperation in like a dog  
from the cold and breathtaking rain  
Technicolor autumn singing songs  
to our captors on the muddy banks  
of the river we shiver reflective  
daughter of someone else and myself  
the son of how waves are spun  
into shadows together with lichen  
and floating algae inside of which  
I can see flashes of a fish's body

## LIKE A TORTOISE- SHELL HAIR-CLIP

one hair's width separates forgiveness  
in my mind from the daily grind winter's  
orange rind on my desk like a torn-up  
atmosphere writing these sonnets empty  
of everything yet containing all things  
the phone rings I don't answer it  
grabbing for a pencil with my fingertips  
as a tortoise-shell hair-clip grabs hair  
CLEAR the medical team screams  
pulling the kite of my breathing back down  
to what I had before leaving Eden  
(a pair of toenail clippers mint soap  
blurred vision and a ghost I named G-d)



# ELECTRICITY FOR THE SYMPHONY

I felt like the dog who conducted  
electricity for the symphony  
or the cow who roamed through fields low  
as starlight over Mt Olympus the one  
Homer saw not the one in Greece I kept  
my distance played with the trees in my mind  
as if they were hair as if they were  
lines radiating continuously unlike  
circles which are perpetually  
ending the electrical circuits snapping  
throughout the storm our whole house plunged  
into the darkness that Sappho sung

## ST FRANCIS AT THE WEDDING

ducks like winged rockets above the winter  
lake charge over a black-branched stand of trees  
in the distance a deer falls to its knees  
in the snow a crow is watching  
everything and nothing at once the moon  
visible in the day-lit sky like  
a water stain on the mind our eyes align  
before behind and within the quiet  
St Francis calls the sun small enough  
to fit inside the spreading cracks  
in the ice as light continues to fall like rice  
at a wedding where the bear is marrying  
the geometric fish and the trees  
are all shouting out “kiss-kiss kiss-kiss”

## THE WHOLE GARDEN

my Beatrice touches the trees as she  
walks past them with fire ants around her knees  
in halos around her kneecaps I snap  
in two like a river forking east  
to west a sliver of almond between  
the teeth of a squirrel I'll keep safe  
the image of you happy to do whatever  
people used to before the fall  
of the oak tree through the middle  
of the street (and now the detour of it all)  
“nothing with the face of a poet really  
which is a flower and not a face with hands  
which whisper this is my beloved my”  
(and the whole garden will suddenly bow)

## OUT OF THE WHIRLWIND

who sways the traffic lights violently  
during a suburban rainstorm tell me  
if you understand who takes the petals  
of spring flowers and makes them livid  
funnel clouds around you walking  
downtown you must know since you're almost  
thirty years old and have contemplated  
not one but two birds' bodies so tell me  
about the body of a continent  
covered in snow in endless nudity  
because it's pleasing to me to be  
obscene and to fuck with people's ideas  
of the holy do you think you're holy  
please tell me if you have understanding

# UNFOLDING THE NAPKIN

blue snow fell on the behemoth as birds  
dove from concrete perches the lips of  
buildings *the world's a hungry place* sing  
those stars not yet devoured by the collapse  
of other stars *what does it sound like inside*  
*a black hole* is like asking what it  
sounds like inside the mind can you see it  
unfolding the napkin of translucent  
thinking is how it was explained to me  
this concept that G-d is spirit picture  
your own thought as being multi-sided  
how many sides can you count now try  
to unfold the object until the object  
is no longer an object but compassion

## NOTIONS OF LOVE

one day I'll die of inspiration  
purple finch that I am and forget  
to flap my wings on purpose something that  
I like to think no one has ever done  
before which makes me a person  
I suppose presumptuousness coupled  
with romantic notions of love  
like the unsuspecting crow edging  
the building to become a speck of darkness  
over a field and away from every  
kind of symmetry which I think can be  
a kind of inspiration my heart as  
I've heard it said "beating like crazy"

## WARMER WEATHER

repentance is in assenting to silence  
broken by the sound of an airplane I'm  
barely holding on to my ill-clad mind  
as December comes and goes and time  
renews its contract with my toes dug in  
to the snow (which I suppose is only  
a dare for wanting warmer weather  
installing the screen door too early)  
yet this poem is going nowhere which is  
a metaphor I'm sure as my head is  
fucked-up like the bird who flew into  
the window breaking its wing and trying  
to sing on its way down unsuccessfully

## TO LAUGH WILDLY AT HORSE AND RIDER

Job finds himself angry as a blueberry  
in the snow outside Grand Rapids  
Michigan mid-May where a fresh blight  
stays at the center of the whirlwind  
and he (the suburbanite) suffers from  
a kind of broken vase smashed against  
the fireplace flitting ash in leaning  
columns of light that expose space  
for the chaos it is (the cosmos  
it is) as G-d makes remarkably curvy  
lines for the sea to forgive the land  
knotting the chains of the Pleiades  
untying Orion's Belt helping the ostrich  
to laugh wildly at horse and rider



## FROM THE MOUTH OF GABRIEL

so the angel Gabriel kept his word  
and hid his face for my own good he spoke  
things I couldn't understand I was  
filled with sparks and my joints began  
to burn the sky above the interstate  
was a needlepoint of my life and I  
could finally see how eternity  
is not the same thing as forever but  
rather an all-at-onceness which makes  
time a kind of grace that protects us  
from something like the expanse of the sky  
or the reality of such a feeling  
in a vast field the universe falling  
around me like a veil and then lifted

## SOLA SCRIPTURA

you're humble and subtle as the slope  
of your breasts as singular as a pink  
nipple pale as Belgium and England  
alike as we lie here drinking table wine  
drunk-texting sonnets to whatever  
I'd give to smell your hair or bury my  
own into the cleft of your collarbone  
and then argue with you nakedly in  
the morning's light I'd make us some  
green tea because I want you healthy  
so you can (as the Bible says) continue  
to fuck me like a young gazelle

## BY THE OTHER SIDE

cathedral made of oyster shells wherein  
the pearl both exists and has been  
removed I crush white pills into a paste  
and use all of them and ingest them  
to form the body inside my own  
shell of a frame physically depressed  
and yoked to death's fluid sculpture  
(a Bernini made of birthwater) entering  
through a seed-shaped door I pull  
at the pant-leg of the Eucharist  
a child both spoiled and desperate  
the kind of kid who looks through  
(and looks to) the stained glass figures  
the sunlight enters by the other side

## THE LIONS ARE PACING

you have lipstick on your collar I say  
to my father the priest that's just the Blood  
of Christ my son he replies by and by  
(the milky thigh of Mary in my mind)  
William Blake's eyes aligning in the snow  
a statue outside London simply called  
"The Heretic" where birds sit and shit  
and live out their days in unconscious praise  
of that third space between language  
and the mute object sunlight pours through  
the stained glass at the Lincoln Park Zoo  
where I saw the lions pacing and you  
told me to always remember that the cage  
is for the protection of the captor



# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Alice Blue Review, Arsenic Lobster, The Christian Century, Corium Magazine, Country Music, The EcoTheo Review, Interrupture, Jellyfish, Jet Fuel Review, Letters, Newcity, PANK, Poetry, Sixth Finch, and Softblow.*

Eileen Joy, Valerie Vogrin, Michael Snediker, Dean Young, Emily Kendal Frey, Allan Peterson, Rae Armantrout, Douglas Kearney, Simone Muench, Reginald Gibbons, Ed Roberson, Michael Robbins, Anthony Madrid, Sinéad López, Jesús Escobar, Sofia Leiby, Nate Klug, Mel Keiser, Sara Holing, Jacob Comerci, and my family.

Luke Fidler

Matt Opal

\*

Laurel and Eleanor



ANTHONY OPAL (b. 1983) is Editor of *The Economy*. His poems can be found in *Poetry*, *Boston Review*, *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, and elsewhere. He lives near Chicago with his wife and daughter. [[anthonyopal.com](http://anthonyopal.com)]

The text of *ACTION* is set in Minion Pro, an original typeface designed by Robert Slimbach in 1990.







Opal, Anthony

*Action [poems]*

punctum books, 2014

ISBN: 9780692335543

<https://punctumbooks.com/titles/action/>

<https://www.doi.org/10.21983/P3.0083.1.00>