

Elizabeth Willis

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Wesleyan Poetry

Elizabeth Willis

# ADDRESS

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## ADDRESS

I is to they  
as river is to barge  
as convert to picket line  
sinker to steamer  
The sun belongs to I  
once, for an instant  
The window belongs to you  
leaning on the afternoon  
They are to you  
as the suffocating dis-  
appointment of the mall  
is to the magic rustle  
of the word "come"  
Turn left toward the mountain  
Go straight until you see  
the boat in the driveway  
A little warmer, a little stickier  
a little more like spring

TAKE THIS POEM

Take this spoon  
from me, this  
cudgel, this axe  
Take this bowl  
this kettle, this  
continental plate  
Take, if you will,  
this shallow topsoil  
above my bedrock  
This swingset  
above the topsoil  
this raven  
from my hair

Take your fear  
from its closet  
Take this shirt  
in need of washing  
this unread book  
Take this child  
this husband, this  
teacup, this  
provisional weather  
Take this pill  
with a tall glass

of water, take this  
bus deep into  
the interior

Take my wife  
even if I meant  
to keep her  
Take my share  
I don't need it  
Take as long  
as you need to  
Take this line  
between breathing  
and voting  
Take this city  
Take that expensive  
ship across this  
cellophane model  
of the sea

Take the F train  
but not to Brooklyn  
Take the case  
of the missing cufflinks  
Take this beverage  
with its silver  
Pullman ice

---

Take me with you  
as far as you can go  
I won't cause  
any trouble

Take this office  
overlooking the people  
Take this patience  
and burn it to the ground  
Take down your  
vanities, your hippodrome  
your champagne  
pyramid

Take down your hair  
your curtains, your  
razorwire fence  
Take off your greasepaint  
your necklace, your wig  
your inadequate armor

Take off your coat  
Stay a little longer  
Take the low road  
out into the sunset

Take it out back  
And take it  
to the people  
Take Florida  
Take Ohio  
Take Wisconsin  
Take Missouri

Take this chamber  
like a bullet  
Take this house  
and paint it black  
or take it down

---

NOCTURNE

I'm thinking of  
the heat in the reins  
a gear in love with itself  
two parts that fit  
I'm thinking about your face:  
there's nothing to invent  
Driven to distraction  
or just walking there  
The edge of my mind  
against the edge of yours  
An astrolabe isn't thinking  
of a concrete lane  
or unconquerable interior  
Abiding by its class  
and country church, a kitsch picture  
is not "sincerity"  
though I am native to it  
A nation has this sound  
of being born The human  
is not its ill-begotten ad  
A hemisphere is not your hair  
in its Parisian rooms  
An astrolabe is not

---

a metaphor for love  
though love contain the mortal roots  
of congress, like a peasant  
inside the name you give its ruins



FRIDAY

Coming to you  
from a jumbled dream

My heart caves in  
the better to see you with

I'm thinking on the bright side  
while looking for my keys

I've never seen a body  
floating to the ceiling

in the big room  
of the post office

A word is a symptom  
of what can't be described

A promise, a premise  
held open like a door

So I didn't find mercy  
or it didn't find me

---

It's always personal  
like the failure of a knee

A brassy rebuttal  
clowning in the street

Your footprint on the planet  
pinned down by outer space

BALLAD

Sometimes I think I see the air  
and all that was potential  
acquires the aura of its birth:

the desert that became a bottle  
that broke into a crown  
that chose to seize its day

Because I couldn't stop  
for breath, my legs outran  
their shadow like a train

By which I mean a cornfield  
long-legged, mechanical,  
the rhythm of a film

in the middle distance  
shooting the horizon  
The earth is round

A SPECIES IS AN IDEA (1)

Leaving my umbrella  
I left everything behind

That dog, an emblem  
of my dirty self

All this reflection  
amounting to shadows

Ink eats the page:  
it's Chemistry against the Forest

What train are you on  
with all these thoughts?

What bitter landscape  
the better to hear you with?

Its stepless grid  
is suddenly a corridor

You write this down  
You're at the end of it

---

F. A. Q.

Looking for the bigger picture  
too early in the day  
to curl into a question  
you'll only have to answer later  
Turn over the planet  
like a dewy rock  
The difference  
between hot and cold  
is not great at a distance  
Appearing through the blind  
a golden bough is just  
a handle into hell  
a vehicle that pays its toll  
to name the day  
as if it were a country

---

VALET OF THE SHADOW OF DEATH

Welcome to our treasured island  
seized from the tribe  
of enemy combatants  
who nursed us through  
the winter of 1642

This heap of shoes  
This copper beech  
This highway butter

This featureless cottage  
about to be filled  
with “genuine antiques”  
This track into milkweed  
seen from the ground

This monumental train  
that thought it could  
replace the barge  
before it got choked out  
by interstate  
trying to protect  
inalienable piracy

Planes thrown down  
like lightning  
Lightning thrown  
like a glove

This eye is not a camera  
passing through  
the comb-like trees

This theory with its  
problematic central arc  
will be for sale  
when the poem is over

This is the end  
of the bike path

The moving sidewalk  
is about to end  
with the future on it  
loaded with blankets  
looking for a place to lie down

---

UNSEASONABLE PASTORAL

Those little hairs are really feathers  
connected to the past  
Behavior eats us up  
A cardinal in the berry bush  
Unmothered sometime

Don't feel ashamed of any bird  
I wake up long enough  
to think this is creepy  
but not long enough  
to write it down

I'm building the haystack  
I'll disappear into  
Everything's too much  
until it's nothing  
Try to find that woodpecker  
in the jigsaw of the trees

Sink the dream into the hole  
Throw its flag into the carpet dark  
A test of composition  
to open the field  
betrayed by nightfall's  
hourly wage



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