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## Orphan Eye

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ORPHAN EYE

A Thesis Presented

by

M. M. WILSON

Submitted to the Graduate School of the  
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment  
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English  
Program for Poets & Writers

ORPHAN EYE

A Thesis Presented

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M. M. WILSON

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ABSTRACT

ORPHAN EYE

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These are poems written by M. M. Wilson between the dates of August 2015 and March 2018. These poems were written in Belchertown, MA and Amherst, MA.

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## Introduction

What would a bodiless, a hostless, a parentless eye see? The orphaned eye would lack interpretations from the body, the brain, the world, society— nothing would inform its seeing. The poems here waiver between wishing that could be true and knowing that it is not. There is an awareness of this unshaped eye as a pretense, but also a continual denying and accepting of that awareness over and over again. Ultimately, I believe, each poem rejects the artifice of an orphan eye as not only impossible, but useless. The constraint of seeing things for what we are, for what we know, is what creates our sense of beauty. If our perception was not altered by this constraint we would live in reality, which is not just useless, but terrifying. How awful it would be, I can't imagine, or rather, I can imagine and that is the pleasure. In a way, then, the title of the collection is a sort of negative definition.

I feel a bit guilty for a title that seems to favour the eye over the ear, because sound is the impetus of all of my writing. Sound is so fundamental to the meaning of these poems that I would hope that it couldn't be overlooked (or under heard?) The sound is what creates. To me, the sound of language exists very much on the page. It is like a form of synesthesia where the eye's movements and recognitions take part in the act of hearing the poem into being. The words, even the letters, are textures that I work with to form the final surface that will create meaning through the act of reading. I want readers to read these poems as musicians play their instruments, acknowledging the need for both player and instrument to result in music.

The child's series of poems wants attention here, as well as in the collection, so I'll indulge in talking about them. The three poems somehow contain the rest of the collection, but they contain it in the passive way that a clear, glass jar contains the light of a candle. They exist with and around everything else, including me. I needed them. I still need them. For obvious reasons, I prefer the lullabies to the nightmare. However, the nightmare feels necessary to the lullabies. The very fact of having the lullabies, their existence, created the need for them, a kind of self-birth. Thus came the nightmare. My hope is that all of the poems in the collection are simultaneously themselves & their motivators, the destination & the verb. It is through these dynamic acts that I hope reading these poems will make you stay in the moment of your, their, and our need.

I'm indebted to other writing, music, language, silence, stillness, and the present moment; it is the idea of the absolute presence of the self and the moment that has released me to to listen for what I might find, destroy, remake, or witness in these poems.



To think the world is one thing  
    when really it's a lot of little things  
  
that make you scared  
    of reading in your own backyard—  
  
—not the being there,  
    but the you being there, like a tornado  
  
or explosive. You think  
    of yourself, picture yourself, sitting there,  
  
what that will mean for you  
    when tonight you dissolve into every  
  
part of light you see.  
    The underwhelming idea of body as if  
  
to feel were not a terrible thing.  
    The world in every moment shattering  
  
all your ways of being  
    with bird wings and traffic wind, the sound  
  
of a sliding glass door,  
    the shade in wood pouring.

## My Sister

I was born upside down and backwards,  
breech, baby B. That's why  
my name is Megan and not  
Marissa— an alphabetic fate my parents believed in.  
But I was the bigger one by two ounces  
and in some ancient, barbaric culture  
I would've lived and she would've been sacrificed  
or left in a frozen Siberian forest  
but instead we were made identical in the same  
horrific, geometric-pastel 90s American fashion.  
I can't tell who I am  
in any of our old photos. I guess  
telling us apart wasn't needed before  
we were easily classifiable and  
I learned to hate her with everything I had  
because there was a right way and a wrong way  
of doing everything, like going to church  
with dad when everyone else had stopped  
because he couldn't go two sermons  
without fighting the pastor. I saw  
a million churches all wrong.  
When I finally got away  
you'd think I would've been happy,  
empowered, relieved, and for a second  
I was, until without an alter  
to sacrifice the world on  
my brain began letting itself  
of all this blood until I finally  
told my sister how much I suffered and she said  
I know you think I'm an idiot but I'm not  
and I loved her for that. We're now all equal  
in a world controlled by a distinction need,  
a need to say you are not me, how  
dare you even think that. I love  
how I can turn to my sister and say  
what are we thinking today and she'll say  
shut up you're talking like a poet again

and maybe I am. For once I think  
crying might be useful if I say  
tell me about that dream you had  
where everybody loved you  
and you had a million friends at school  
because I've had that dream too  
and I'm no longer afraid to admit it.  
But some people can't stand the idea  
that they aren't special, that they don't have the right to grab  
whatever they can because they can like  
my sister when we'd only just got here,  
and we wanted it all, so she grabbed  
my arm and put it into her mouth until I gave up  
whatever piece of plastic I was holding  
whenever she came near.  
My mother had to ask the pediatrician  
if she should bite her daughter, but no  
that wouldn't have worked, I needed to be the one  
to show my sister what pain was really like  
and our poor mother had to coach  
resistance until I really believed  
that I could do something, that my own mouth  
was capable of sending signals to the outside  
that I am you, even if you can't see it  
I'll make you feel it, and my sister  
even before a year understood that.

Considering If It Were Yes That

→

The same feeling you get when leaving through an emergency door like a burst of I don't know into something warmer you think is warmer. How does it work like that— all the yellowness the sand and outer space and you in the middle falling, falling.

→

For the sake of as much we are polite  
and do not ask to lay our heads in laps  
each other's what could be only cursory,  
the this is what we know—  
what screaming could I walk on you,  
my searching fingers in your open mouth.

→  
Considering if it were yes that  
then yes, that fleece drinking  
a warm stove blackening soft  
the wish of a catalyst nine p.m. arrived  
snow drifting louder down upon your face  
and I thought we were dancing.

→

I confess that I fear to love & vice versa.  
All of that I hurt myself in a book of walls.  
Pages made of mountainside. Great big aggregate  
funneling down all desire & run from.  
When offered the moon I neither rise nor fall  
but lie still pretending to be my own ocean.

*a child's lullaby no. 1*

the she-  
bear  
runs there  
in the wild

the wild there  
runs  
like the stars  
when you see  
too far away  
all at once

the she-bear  
runs there  
to the stars

in the morning  
the she-bear  
comes home  
steps from the stars  
into the stone

the she-  
bear  
runs there



## The Butterfly

There is a place you go  
when no one is watching.  
It is a cradle of birds in flight  
carrying the last snow on Earth  
to a prisoner's head, already sacrificed  
to the indoor flies of December.

I have been killing myself all over the place.  
On the ceiling, on the table, under the bed  
more than once, in the mirror, in the bathtub  
actually the lake, or was it the ocean—  
                    that fat dog chasing a black butterfly behind me  
out of time, always at night.

## The Light Years

A calf to the blue  
light swimming  
around you

it watches you whole  
and looming  
fills the space

Our bodies burn out  
across the room  
the divergent

celestial rays of drums  
calling out to each  
how indigo blooms

into desiccation  
fevered wild in knowing  
we have counted  
so many days

## Born At Night

*after James Schuyler*

I.

If it's you or me bumblebee  
crooked hanging in the corner  
let it be me. Again. The humility  
of being horizontal, prostrate on  
the lacquered floor, stained a  
deep coffee, humming a taste  
like all the water that's ever been  
steeped into the boards. This is not  
lonely. The sunlit particles convulsing  
towards a current of air cold  
and fallen down the stairs to  
greet the soiled stepped-on sheets  
of reflective magazines pushed through  
the doorway. Good morning crows,  
good morning picture frame, good morning  
table legs and hidden outlets.

II.

A life mimed and molted  
into tea bags of peppermint divulging  
a systematic passage of time  
punishing the wood grain for not holding  
and not loving the rug enough.  
There is no way of being on the ground  
without feeling close to the dirt,

its smell the only strand what crawls  
up through the cracks & vanishes.  
A delicate life setting bright  
on an old day with tulips  
growing. Green sharp tips exposed  
to the light of a living room  
upholstery, mugs, books defolded,  
a life worn out and shortened  
like dismembered bulbs forever  
among shards of glass, tap water,  
covered by a film of dust, a life like  
a golden pony running at the horizon.

*She put water in a vase and wished for flowers.*

the risk of a bud  
before the bud  
the distinct hard edges  
of the first unbled move  
towards something like saturation

the still deep blue  
moments like a room  
steeped into being  
the run-off  
milky and bright

As It Were

*after Marianne Moore*

You've heard a cicada

who's known a heartbreak, but  
is, in his compound gut,

a jellyfish or red-

juice tooth of beautiful  
defeat. How suitable

the mantis can repent

without his head and yet  
Bertran de Born's beset

with grief! Enzymes that melt

the tender soon-to-be  
butterfly will still leave

the crawler's mind intact

with fear. I once did see  
a disembodied bee

thorax and face crawling

toward an empty beer  
can to die without fear;

as Cato with his sword

or as loved dogs, sadden,

do starve. Death is pretty

when all the ugliness

is seen; a dead brown cat  
freezes on a mudflat

near the highway road— so

the fur's ripped from its tail  
showing the skin so pale

like the milky whiteness

of baby teeth displayed  
for science, all arrayed.

## Mother's Loss

I mourn a picture of your gravestone  
It is background for      years  
                                  without contact

Someone else has your number  
so I can't not have it  
                                  anymore

I am sick from wanting  
whoever has it to die  
to make dead again the line  
I lost                    and must stay  
I lost

again you have missed it all  
which missed you back buried  
alone                    wanting to get away  
from where you are    but not you  
and I can't

                          in frames you  
in my life            my young life  
I see that photograph daily  
I wonder            a bad thing  
to see you again & again  
                                  falsely  
not to see          that I will never see  
                                  to act otherwise

a palsy to my own heart  
not fully having the loss  
feeling not the absence  
you are            you were  
a great suffering



a tower  
of sacrifice your early life  
lifting your own  
father's spleen to the ambulance  
when the cops took you  
again  
home to your own mother  
later  
lost her living—  
your biggest fear I know

can I take solace  
you lived not long enough  
to lose yourself lose me  
your baby youngest you called  
last for yourself you tried  
so much not to continue  
the loss that is  
a constant (not) there

to keep up that bearing power  
you spoke  
you said the things of life  
its awful truths to learn  
I can't help  
but think you  
were prophetic of yourself  
you said

then you die  
did you  
was it  
I am afraid  
alone in death  
you know it

The Moon in Its Low Chamber

I sleep  
upways into  
the morning I  
cannot sleep  
at night

anymore  
the light  
is always on  
in the sky

a box of holding  
light, a box  
containing it  
all bright  
I am

alright  
if I say  
I am

*a child's lullaby no. 2*

there is a bird  
that carries a pearl  
which everybody knows, which  
everybody knows

a caterpillar owns an emerald stone

there is a tiger's topaz eyes  
that have seen  
beyond the sky, beyond  
this side

come the summer  
we will know  
the sapphire that grows  
holding us  
in this deep sleep

## Pneumonia Complications

maybe perhaps  
it'll be like this  
the dogs in the woods  
sounding off  
or a dumb whistle  
nodding to the place  
in the park  
where you are strung out  
over a Daisy

even a chainlink fence  
can block you in  
a red hot air balloon  
falls on your head  
or you make it out  
only to choke  
a dry piece of toast  
down further

your throat  
wrapped in a wool scarf  
with loose threads  
catching  
the crashing plane  
you are under  
at twenty-four

## Aversion

For example, a small snow  
gets plowed into a pyramid  
of glacial size, a carriage wheel  
jutting from the summit  
like a proud weathercock.

Or in other cases, the spool turns  
faster and faster the faster  
it grows smaller but it  
just looks that way the men bury it  
the less there is the more it is  
running out out of control  
racing to deplete itself—  
*Get it over with already!*  
*I know what you're going to do!*

Everything in Between

Do snails have hearts

arachnids mollusks even

You are only sometimes      what I think you are  
A gravity an atmosphere      something I run into

I love those white bow ties  
like a man covered in bees  
I want to catch them  
once uncupped

spasmodically flying  
a pilot under siege of tickles  
make them stop  
learned nothing

You are more often      an osprey  
    riding the wind      of a massive clay landslide  
I think I am a beetle      in that same slide  
You flaplessly follow      a homing satellite

Could a mouse within that current      rationalize it  
Or would his humming heart      just stop

## Summer Is Awful

I am not sentimental, I have been told.  
The torpid sickness of personal misting fans and subtropic heat—  
I'd rather die in this southwest facing bedroom  
than see another person as uncomfortable as me,  
because fuck them, right? Adam found out he's been doing it wrong.  
The car's climate maker can't keep up either.  
It's more of a grinding motion than a pumping action.

Trying Again to Pretend for Reason

Give me this much you know—  
the aching milk sounds  
a dish time washed over  
that my hands so foamed  
a great whenness like weeping.

Give me such rheumy eyes,  
I am still bovine  
and searching at the empty  
of people around me,  
the lack of how it suffocates.

I ate the coin you'd given me  
so easily, as if it were easy—  
to seek evidence this happened,  
all of this to myself.



## How to Something Else

Nowhere on earth offers reprieve  
from scenes reminiscent of all  
good things, soft terry cloth,

the space behind an ear or postage stamp,  
barn lofts, soup broth or mere scent,  
& nights so cold your bed must learn to tolerate

more than one person, which liberates the soul  
to greater things, when the world becomes  
a casual bet between friends, and the only concern

how to grow a mushroom farm  
how to keep the mud from getting in  
how to make love in a small house

while screaming the periodic table  
to confirm your own voice is real  
& reaches into the dark sabbath night

where long vigils are each second,  
time shrouded in mouthwash, wool socks,  
white noise machine on high

but still, the crepuscular sting of knowing  
your smell lingers on that chair, cherry  
chapstick and five-dollar gin, my love

hell is the only place not to wonder  
how someone's ears and nose  
can smile so brightly.

*We fought them with our teeth*

and in our own way  
of being  
together we have made  
wherever birds are born  
or cover is formed  
spaces of us  
where not even  
the sun can go

Detritus

Entire mountains  
can be found within

to have a crust, a thinness  
so likely to break

it almost already has.  
All that matter moving

so chaste its company  
the gathered dried

foliage quiet in chatter,  
resting on the silt the hill

a hidden pace to new  
elevations is startled—

the potential delicate  
shattering sound

that dead things contain—  
the afterglow of earthquakes,

rustling like their mothers.

## Orphan Eye

the hem of this  
unsettled mind  
is hard to find  
the velvet pain  
of soft and green  
which left a mark  
with bitter spleen  
and followed past  
constraints behind  
from powers tied  
of blue and cream  
to rigid molds  
and this routine  
the rounding straight  
and broken kind  
of living what  
you did not mean

## Plastic Furniture

her rounded square kitchen table  
up against the wall like a thought  
already too small for eating

suggests what was wanted but not  
too precisely counting the calendar  
is a tally of spite and need

of microwaving from frozen  
the congealed and reconstituted  
served like a sentence over

the hex honeycomb design  
escaping the formica surface  
this is a commitment to minimize

the space an unregulated size  
of displacement is needed never  
really believing in eating there

ideal forming attainable and not  
the other way to round  
the room she buys a bigger one

## I Am Carrying a Body in Rags

Give more it says the muslin wrap  
bunching in spots and tearing  
over my shoulders I am a water buffalo  
Give more my horns say  
my steps are slapping leather steps  
hot dusty street the mutterings  
forward and back I cannot listen  
it urges we are rounding the edge  
of the civilized now to the jungle  
swamp layers deeper and deeper  
until you are up to your chin  
the body more mud than desire  
you can see pen and ink pot  
a man asks your name  
and your burden answers him

## Routine Daily Catastrophes

When it happened, we were all unaware of any change in the weather or any sense of a cosmic importance speeding toward us.

When it happened, I was eating the furry flesh of a kiwi on the balcony of a sunny Saturday morning.

When it happened, we were eating crab cakes on a blue lagoon.

When it happened, the stars were playing poker in the basement of the Milky Way using electrons as antes.

When it happened, the moon was singing love songs about koi to the rainbow.

When it happened, the sun had gone fishing.

We Learned Undressing So That It Became an Act of Sacrifice

remove

the inside velvet

turkey innards

a cartilage moon

milk teeth

assurance claims

revealing sound

endless space

a waveform

between seconds

take in

sea glass

wet pottery

brown sugar on pork

thrilling

porous now

dead skin flakes

the open tongue

for once

we make love

like real animals



Ruin

A leaf came towards me.

A reason of light things.  
Tobacco-brown and unglazed,  
Dull fragility on its way  
To the foreground of me.

How it ruins— to think  
I would miss it all  
If not for watching  
The late comers  
To church that morning.

An ease of enthrallment  
Tumbled into focus—  
Unguided, although I like to say

It came right towards me.

## Monster Cat

Pick me up, carry me  
on the shelf of your neck  
your legs are furry telephone poles  
your round, furry baby body  
like a lima bean with one big eye  
Walk us into the night  
with slow easy mile-wide strides  
and I'll make you a crown of me  
Describe to me the openness  
above the trees, the sense of relief  
to see multiple landscapes at once  
and the air as if you have no  
lungs at all no capacity infinite  
capacity for all the beautiful cold.

## Not Until Morning

At night I think  
    every bad thing  
anyone has ever  
    done to anyone  
I see red  
    blistering  
dissolving  
    bleach poured  
into the eyes  
    of an eleven year old  
held down  
    by two other  
eleven year olds  
    you say don't  
focus the disaster  
    but what  
if not the disaster  
    you say  
the white helmets  
    Paris pumpkin  
spice the Noble  
    but you look  
like a spaceman  
    and I've just  
passed Mars  
    flying or falling  
will you notice  
    going toward any light  
extends your shadow  
    and brightens it

Otherwise

In a high, bushy crown  
of a Ohia tree, a pair  
of Akekee are nesting.

The white, dusty spots of lichen  
like plaster  
wet and dried and  
wet and dried and the monogamous  
couple has wedged  
heavy moss  
into the forks of tall, straight branches  
with an underweave  
of fine, wet grasses.

The dry nut-brown leaves  
curl, securing more closely  
the nest within.

So well does the nest occupy and fill up  
the space it is in,  
you cannot imagine  
it to be otherwise.



below the spine  
behind the eyes  
on the floor and under  
the moment run away  
from disaster

do not come where I am  
looking for me  
lost in this space the body  
I left years ago

I Am Not a Constellation and You Are Not a Tapestry.

We eat eggs at diners we go to together.

Why you salt your burgers is one of the great mysteries of the universe.

You say it's because your dad did.

Our flat is of the East End style.

I brought a vaguely southwestern runner for the hallway.

You put your eighth grade shop class cut-out of a whale on the wall.

I want to take the cast iron pan and when you taught me Lacan.

You will take the flat screen and a sense of what you want.

I go to you when I hate the sound of people shouting over music.

We watch hockey, eat fake onion flavors.

I leave you when I read or start writing.

You leave with a toaster pastry at eight o'clock every morning.

Why I want you to hold me is the uneven heating of the Earth's surface.

Why you do is your business.

Let's go someplace together.

The Still Life

the long grass  
long wind blown  
matted, heavy

tree, lattice  
of leaves—  
a small sound  
blown open

the grey light  
the grey day bore

sing  
a little longer



Into More Dark

Try to witness the night  
more than stars

                          more than street lights—  
their shadows  
                  casting dark     into more dark

                          — Heat Lamp, bring me some warmth  
the sun is on safari  
                          the children are always fighting

why the sudden mystery  
I get lonely at night

and look           in the dark—

  something I can't remember