

**THE BEAUTIFUL NOW**

*A spoken word opera for 4 voices*

by

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## Caesura (Overture: Birth)

Hmmmm..... [chorus]

In the time before we are known

in the time that is known

as the time before

We are (we know)

Breathless, not needing breath

To breathe is (to sigh) (to whisper) (to s'inspirer)

Lying on our sides at the edge of infinity

trailing our fingers in the way of milk

Clustered together cosmic fingers touching entwining winding around

The helices of infinity infinitely spiraling through---

Spreading out slowly quickly fast and faster so fast we are

slow in the vastness of vast—

Magnificent desolat(ion)e limitless

But we are not alone

We are we (we know)

Breathless, not needing to breathe

Needing no breath or breadth

We are everything and nothing and every thing

Atomless we are

Atomical points

The point is

We are (we know)

We //

We have heard (they say)

Whispers sighs s'inspirer

Inspire life some form of

Atomless atomical

Anatomical

Life

On some green orb (the earth)

A cold (and warm) and young (and old) and firey (and icy) place

It is not one thing it is not all things

It is only this and that only thing at a time

One thing at a time

One thing terrifying thing

And cold and gray (and blue and warm)

And pain and loss (and love)

And age and fear (and youth and joy)

And loneliness [*chorus*]

And death (a return) [*solo*]

Some things some lives they make / Love

They create there / Love

A universe / a cosmos contained / Love

The moment they come together and call us (one of us) (only one) (one at a time) into being

pull us through space and time to climb

the helices of this particular DNA

up through blue or brown or green or black

or black or auburn ginger blonde

his eyes and her mouth through which I see and breathe is

**Us us us us we we we we me me me me I I I I I**

**I [*chorus*] //**

But I do not want

I do not want

to go

To leave

this time before I am known known as the time before

For the unknown

this unknown time (of life)

When all of life is nothing more than

tumble-ing tumble-ing tumble-ing tumble-ing falling and tumble-ing down

(Death (a return) (life love warmth)) [*whispered in chorus*]

To become

Skin to beat like a heartbeat (an entire heart) beats through skin

I am (I know) / me is (me knows)

Breathless now

Out of breath

I cannot breathe I cannot breathe

Give me safe passage then //

a gentle journey //

prolong (make long) the moment when

I first

open

my

eyes

**Ad Astra  
(Childhood)**

Voices 1 & 2 [alternating at breaks : /]	Voices 3 & 4 [singsong, in unison]
<p>Once upon a time</p> <p>The world was narrated in /</p> <p>Small voices, short and stout</p> <p>Small assemblies, pouring out /</p> <p>Of small voices /</p> <p>Strange it was</p> <p>All fists and teeth and building blocks /</p> <p>Tiny sounds, tiny noises /</p> <p>No teeth, not yet, just noise small wet noise that never seemed to end /</p> <p>(A soundtrack of nursery rhymes and baby chimes and keeping time /</p> <p>Until one day it did. (End)</p> <p>The blocks fell down the fists fell down the teeth came down</p> <p>Hard pretty hard on the rain and <b>washed the spider out!</b> [chant fortÉ]</p> <p>//</p> <p>Out comes the sun and dries up all the rain and</p> <p>and off we go over mountain snow</p> <p>with bags of snails and puppy dog tails</p> <p>and curls in the middle of our foreheads</p> <p>Singing rida rida ranka pirum parum param</p> <p>And you can come</p> <p>And you can come</p> <p>And you can come too</p> <p>[charging blissfully unawares into our futures the bucolic joys of childhood delicately balanced</p>	<p>I'm a little teapot Short and stout Here is my handle here is my spout When I get all steamed up Hear me shout Tip me over and pour me out</p> <p>Bä, bä, vita lamm, har du någon ull? Ja, ja, kära barn, jag har säcken full! Helgdagsrock åt far och söndagskjol åt mor, och två par strumpor åt lille-, lillebror!</p> <p>Itsy bitsy spider went up the water spout</p> <p>Down came the rain and <b>washed the spider out!</b> [chant fortÉ]</p> <p>Out came the sun and dried up all the rain And the itsy bitsy spider Went up the spout again</p> <p>And when she was good she was very very good And when she was bad she was horrid</p> <p>Am stram gram</p> <p>pique et pique et colagram</p> <p>bourre et bourre et rataplam</p>

against the rest of our lives the sweet sweetness  
the golden light the golden sorrows the Dixie-  
land candy-striped belle époque of pirate hats and  
dinosaur eggs and clocks made out of paper  
plates (! – find that note)

Out comes the sun and dries up all the rain, and  
we'll never ever hear that lullabye again

am stram gram

pique dame.

Miss Mary Mack Mack Mack [*hand claps*]  
All dressed in black black black [*hand claps*]  
With silver buttons buttons buttons [*hand claps*]  
All down her back back back [*hand claps*]

La Samaritain' tain' tain' [*hand claps*]  
Va a la fontain' tain' tain' [*hand claps*]  
Va puiser de l'eau l'eau l'eau [*hand claps*]  
Dans un petit seau seau seau [*hand claps*]  
Le pieds a bu-té té té [*hand claps*]  
Le seau est tom-bé bé bé [*hand claps*]  
L'eau s'est renversée

**ARS ADOLESCERE**  
(Youth & Love)

<b>Voice 1 (in the style of an '80s Rock Power Ballad)</b>	<b>Voices 2-4 (in the style of teenagers)</b>
<p>Who am I to know how to live?            Everyone lives behind closed doors            I hear them dancing, maybe the tango            Turning round and round on the floor            But I'm, I'm on the other side            I hear laughter it scares me            Music it moves me            And I want to go through that door            I'm frightened and weak, sick with longing            As I tremble I stumble to the floor            For I cannot take my life anymore            You come along, show me your hand            Pull me up and take mine in yours            Together we lean against that door            Wishing, wishing we could be kings</p>	<p>Dear Diary,            Dear, dear Diary,            Dear, dear, dear Diary,            You're the only one who understands me.            [chorus]            Everything's changing, it's happening so fast            For example, today I discovered:            Rock &amp; roll            And naps            It's all so simple, if we just look inside            We have all the answers            To everything, everywhere, and all of the time</p>
<p>There is a wall with three doors in it            And nobody has the key            Locked from the inside baby            They try to keep out people like you and me            One for fighters            One for jokers            One for players            Think they have all the answers            But I'll tell you somethin' 'bout all these dancers            They're not expecting us            To turn the key to the universe            Like an old pick-up truck            To rev up our engines and run through the night            Straight from the bottle to the Milky Way            And crash through those doors            Let us be kings!</p>	<p>Dear Diary,            Dear, dear Diary,            Dear, dear, dear Diary            You'll never believe what happened today            [chorus]            Today I discovered            World Peace            The cure for cancer            What everybody's problem is            (What is everybody's problem)            All we need is love            And warm Friday nights            And freedom.</p> <p>Dear Diary,            Today I discovered            Girls / Boys [2 voices]            Love</p>
<p>Yeah that's right Baby,            As soon as I make it            That's when a new wall goes up            With the three doors in it            One for dreams</p>	

<p>One for thrones  And one for all the unknown  We'll walk through those doors together  Love forever  And we shall be kings</p>	
<p>When we're through to the other side  In that ballroom of far away  Stepping onto that crowded dance floor  No matter what happens  Even if it's just for one night  We'll know our love was real  Because together we opened the door  You'll lean into me, I'll lean into you  We'll dance the tango and show them how it's  done  And there will be no more doors because  We are kings!</p>	<p>Dear Diary  Dear Diary  Dear Diary  Why didn't anyone tell me?  Dear Diary, today I wrote  One thousand poems about rain  I never want to feel that way again  But I'll go on  Despite the pain  Because today I discovered  Myself.  I wonder what comes next.</p>

**Amor fati**  
(Destiny)

**Voice 1**

A man wakes up on a moving train. Midmorning. He opens his paper and reads the news. The news is the same. He blinks, and blinks again, unable to see the words, the page, the news. It's not the morning light that blurs his vision. It's not the green and rolling countryside the train hurtles through. He checks his ticket for the 20<sup>th</sup> time. The ticket is the same. He looks out the window, watches the green and rolling countryside. He's on the right train, heading in the right direction, and will arrive when he's supposed to. And he realizes: he bought a one way ticket.

**Voice 2**

A woman wakes up on a moving train. Noon. She looks around her carriage, her eyes still heavy with sleep. She opens her purse and takes out a small mirror. She looks the same. She blinks, and blinks again. She looks out the window as another train streaks past, going in the opposite direction, a blur of metal and hurry. It is not lingering sleep that blurs her vision, it is not the mirror bouncing afternoon light. It is the speed of the passing train, and she realizes: she wanted to be on that one.

**Voice 3**

A man wakes up on a moving train. Night. He has no memory of buying a ticket, boarding, taking a seat. He looks out the window, can only see pitch-black night. The last thing he remembers is walking through a door, and then he wakes up on a moving train. He does not know where the train came from or where it's going, whether it hurtles through forest or desert, farmland or city. He lurches out of the carriage and into the twilight corridor, gropes his way from one end of the car to the other, seeking a door, a conductor, a fellow passenger. Anything to explain this train.

**Voice 4**

A woman is awake on a moving train. Midnight. The train slips through the velvet night, wheels hitting the joints in the rail on the carefully laid track. She does not know who laid the track, joined the rails, drives the train. She walks out of her carriage and into the corridor, empty but for the sound of the wheels and buzzing lights. She feels her way down the corridor to the door leads to the empty space between the cars. In the rushing wind and swaying night, she listens to the wheels on the track, a tango in triple time, wishing she had never gotten on this train.

**All Voices (alternate at the break)**

A man and a woman on a moving train. Morning. // Each feels their way through the corridors, blinking away the dawn light. // They would like a word with the conductor. // The train races across a desert, through a forest, over canyons, under mountains. // The man and the woman stumble through the corridors, cling to the walls of the tilting, rattling, speeding train. // The train careens round a bend in the tracks, throws the man and the woman against each other, into each other, // trembling and stumbling, stumbling and falling, down. // They help each other to their feet and, // together, they realize: // there is no conductor, there are no tracks, there is no train. // But they're heading in the right direction.

**Salvo Errore et Omissione  
(Wisdom)**

[Silence for 20 beats]

Some light coughing, shuffling. Some nodding in agreement at each other.

[Silence for 10 beats]

**ALL VOICES (quietly):**

When writing a minimalist poem  
about wisdom

the less said

the better.

[Silence for 20 beats]

**Ad Asterion**  
**(Unanswered Questions)**

**Voice 1: in the style of an aged Theseus returning to the Labyrinth**

**Chorus: in the style of a Greek chorus**

**Voice 1** I walked through your old  
neighborhood under the bridge today.

The city has changed

Not as tough

Not as dangerous.

A lot of things are missing.

At the threshold of your front door  
I arrive not lost: bemused.  
What am I doing here?  
What was I doing here before?

Drawing the stars down from heaven  
– is that what I would have done?

Stolen stars have already been  
replaced.  
What did I conquer?  
What did I slay?  
Who can get out of an infinite house?

**Chorus** How you once rampaged!  
How you did conquer!

**Chorus** The city is the same city is  
the same

**Voice 2** No.

**Voice 3** Old

**Voice 4** You mean you.

**Chorus** You mean *youth*.

**Chorus** Don't you know? Don't you  
remember anymore?

**Voice 2** You came to conquer

**Voice 3** You came to slay

**Voice 4** You came to get out alive

**Chorus** Who can stay?

**Voice 1** I slow and slow but to cease all  
motion...

I *am* small and listening still--

Not yet. Not yet.  
These walls of infinite glory, these  
walls that once pulsed red  
I trace a plumb line I once followed

Spider bites of memory scratch at my  
brain  
But I no longer remember  
This turn this wall these doors.

I've been here before, but then I only  
wanted to know the way.

But now I only want to know the  
why.

Why build these walls?  
Why this turn, that door, this blocked  
passage, that débouchement?

Listen to these old  
Rumblings through the galleries  
Ramblings through the universe

**Voice 2** The answers are in the small,  
still things.

**Voice 3** Be small.

**Voice 4** Be still.

**Chorus** *Be* still.

**Voice 4** You shudder

**Chorus** You trace the remembrances  
of the dead

**Chorus** But you've been here before!

**Chorus** That's the way.

**Chorus** Why?

**Voice 2** Why is the path not straight?

**Voice 3** Why is the road not open?

**Chorus** Why? Why? Why ask why?

**Chorus** Perverse!

**Voice 1** I listen, and listen, and hear you  
breathe.  
I know I am close, my friend,  
Somewhere near the center  
And at last, and again.  
I will find you.

I thought you were slain  
But you are living still

I no longer remember:  
why would I want to kill?  
Already I know I will not know you.  
You will be old, and grey.  
A withered stranger, not the  
Fearsome fevered dream that I once  
knew.

And I will ask myself: who is he?

What is it?

Who is it?

**Chorus** Find who?

**Chorus** Why would you want to kill?

**Voice 2** Or thought you knew.

**Voice 3** Not a he or a she, but an it.

**Voice 4** Not a what, but a who

**Chorus** It is you.

**CAUDA  
(Death)**

{Audible sigh}  
Give me safe passage then  
Prolong, make long, this lifetime when...  
{sigh}

What star sign are you  
They asked when I arrived  
What constellation are you made of?  
Constellation? I replied  
Why would I be made of stars?

I'm frightened and weak, sick with longing  
As I tremble I stumble to the floor  
I hear laughter it scares me  
Music it moves me  
And I cannot take my life anymore  
I hear them dancing maybe the tango  
But I don't want to go through that --

What star sign are you  
They asked when I arrived  
What constellation are you made of?  
Constellation? I replied  
Why would I be made of stars?

A lot of things are missing  
A lot of things not done

Draw the stars down from heaven – that is what I would have--  
But stolen stars have been replaced  
[The repeated sections are oft adorned with notes of grace]  
A lot of things were never done  
And never will be done.

I slow and slow but to cease all motion...  
Not yet. Not yet. I trace a plumb line I once followed  
I trace the trails of the dead  
The less said the better, lest said.

What star sign are you  
They asked when I arrived  
What constellation are you made of?  
Constellation? I replied  
Why would I be made of stars?

I am the 13<sup>th</sup> constellation  
I am not even that  
I am a part of a part of the 13<sup>th</sup> constellation  
The part that heals and the part that carries life away  
The serpens capo and serpens cauda  
My body stretched across the sky like a train that winds  
All the way round the round universe

Di capo fine { voices }  
Di capo cauda

On a slow, strange loop

Who are these voices on this strange loop  
In time from a time before I am known  
known as the time before  
For the unknown  
this unknown time [of life]  
When all of life is nothing more than  
An inability to shine

What star sign are you  
They asked when I arrived  
What constellation are you made of  
Constellation? I replied  
Why would I be made of stars?

I am flesh I am flesh  
A constellation of tears  
Breathless I am out of breadth

Who are these voices?

Cosmic fingers touching entwining winding around  
The helices of infinity infinitely spiraling  
Spreading out slowly quickly fast and faster so fast  
We are  
(Quick quick quick quick quick)  
Magnificent limitless  
Needing no breath or breadth  
We are everything and nothing and every thing  
Atomless we are  
Atomical points  
Of cold and gray (and blue and warm)  
Of pain and loss (and love)  
Of age and fear (and youth and joy)  
And loneliness  
Of death (a return)  
A universe / a cosmos contained / Love

But I do not want  
I do not want  
I do not want  
To go  
To leave

This time... for the unknown time  
When all of life is nothing more than  
(life) (death (a return))  
I am breathless now  
Out of breath  
I cannot breathe I cannot breathe  
I have no breadth.

Once upon a time there was  
me me me me me  
I I I I I I I I  
we we we we we we we

Obviously I faced the possibility of not returning when I first considered going...

\And you can come  
And you can come  
And you can come too

Hmmmm..... [chorus].