

THE CARTOGRAPHER'S INK

Okla Elliott

NY
Q Books™

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
New York, New York

NYQ Books™ is an imprint of The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.

The New York Quarterly Foundation, Inc.
P. O. Box 2015
Old Chelsea Station
New York, NY 10113

www.nyq.org

Copyright © 2014 by Okla Elliott

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission of the author except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Edition

Set in Book Antiqua

Layout and design by David Bowen

Cover image elements provided by and modified with permission from Struckdumb Graphics and naumoid/Bigstock.com

Author photo by Robert MacCready

Library of Congress Control Number: 2014945804

ISBN: 978-1-63045-010-6

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Birmingham Poetry Review: “Humbaba Clothed in Seven Cloaks”;
“Tilting Toward Winter”

BLIP: Mississippi Review Online: “Lonely in Seoul”

Coe Review: “Emerging from Clouds”

Connotations Press: “Visiting Lenin’s Tomb”

Contrary Magazine: “Alien War, Human War”

Del Sol Review: “The Parable of the Worm in the Apple”; “Shibboleth,
Beginning and Ending with Lines from Kim Ch’un Su”

Fourth River: “Learning Russian”; “The Philosophy Student”

Fourth River: Best of the First Ten Years: “The Philosophy Student”

Freshwater: “What a Vulgar Moon”

Great Lakes Review: “The Artificial Suns of Milwaukee”

International Poetry Review: “A Hot Minute”; “Helpless”

The Laurel Review: “Pointless Movement”

The Literary Review: “That the Soul Discharges Her Passions Upon
False Objects”

The Louisville Review: “Blackened”; “Nikola Tesla Dreams of a
Death Ray Powered by the Forgotten Hopes of Angels”

The Los Angeles Review: "Wishing on a Shooting Star My Friend Informs Me Is Likely Just a Satellite"

Nashville Review: "Think of a House"

New York Quarterly: "How It Ended"; "The Man Who Named Bees"

Oyez Review: "Mannheim, Germany, Phone Booth in the Turkish District"

roger: a journal of the arts and literature: "Reading Kierkegaard Near the St. Louis Arch"; "Near the Ocean"; "The Light Here"; "Yardwork for my Dying Mother"

South Dakota Review: "The Unhappy Theatre"; "Wolf-Sense Sonnet"

The Southeast Review: "The Inside Bird"

Thin Air: "The Idiot's Faith"

Subtropics: "The Patience of the Landmine" (and reprinted as part of *Virginia Quarterly Review's* InstaPoetry Series)

Zone 3: "On Perfection"

The following poems appeared in the limited edition chapbook *A Vulgar Geography* (MSR Press, 2011): "On Perfection"; "The Idiot's Faith"; "Near the Ocean"; "The Light Here"; "How It Ended"; "The Man Who Named Bees"; "Learning Russian"; "The Philosophy Student"; "Emerging from Clouds"; "Yardwork for my Dying Mother"; "Shibboleth, Beginning and Ending with Lines from Kim Ch'un-Su"; and the following poems appeared in the limited edition chapbook *Lucid Bodies and Other Poems* (MSR Press, 2006): "Lucid Bodies"; "What a Vulgar Moon."

CONTENTS

I.

The Light Here	17
Wolf-Sense Sonnet	18
The Man Who Named Bees	19
In the Days of New Wonder	20
Near the Ocean	21
Lonely in Seoul	22
The Patience of the Landmine	24
Humbaba Clothed in Seven Cloaks	25
Alien War, Human War	26
Learning Russian (a Letter to My Schizophrenic Mother)	29
Visiting Lenin's Tomb	30
Blackened	32
The Embalmer's Son	33
The Name of Knowledge	34
Shibboleth, Beginning and Ending with Lines from Kim Ch'un-Su	36
Helpless	37
Loudly Laughing Green	38
Lucid Bodies	39
A Hot Minute	42
Where Man Sits Enthroned	43
Mannheim, Germany, Phone Booth in the Turkish District	44

How It Ended	45
The Idiot's Faith	46
This Bothersome Bird	47

II.

Emerging from Clouds	51
----------------------	----

III.

Tilting Toward Winter	63
Nikola Tesla's Dream of a Death Ray	
Powered by the Forgotten Dreams of Angels	64
Machine-Minded	65
What Lonely Continents	66
An Archipelago of Rainbows	67
Pointless Movement	69
Stars of Orion	70
The Artificial Suns of Milwaukee	72
The Philosophy Student	75
The Unhappy Theatre	76
Apocalypse and Abundance	77
Kaliningrad	78
Think of a House	79
Yard Work for My Dying Mother	81
Nightfishing	82
What a Vulgar Moon	83
Entrances and Exits	84

IV.

Reading Kierkegaard near the St. Louis Arch	87
On Perfection	89
I Want to Be a Buddhist – Or: Reading Martin Heidegger Mildly Hung-over	92
The Parable of the Worm in the Apple	94
Sestina for the Swede-Nevadan	95
Wishing on a Shooting Star My Friend Informs Me Is Likely Just a Satellite	97
That the Soul Discharges Her Passions Upon False Objects	100
The Apocalypso – Or: May I have the Last Dance?	102
The Inside Bird	103

WOLF-SENSE SONNET

I will walk you through the desert, all wolf-
wolf and blood-sandy paws. O smooth rapture
of elegant neck – O underwear hanging
on comic cactus – water-plant, prick-plant
of need. I will lead you through strange danger,
one million nights of apocalyptic lust.
Gone giddy, I'll lick lasciviously
your Lilith lips, lunge, leap, and lie back down.

What am I saying? All sense has left me.
There's a zero at the bottom of this pit.
There's a note of desert music in us.
There's no need of sense, only our senses.

You will walk me wolfily into new need,
and our oasis images will mirror-mirage.

THIS BOTHERSOME BIRD

Through the raw dawn
through the moist forest
our freezing gestures form.

A sunken light impoverishes
our Being-in-the-world.
But I linger, a slight gray bird
fluttering, chirp-chirping
at each flittering thought.

What would you do with me,
this bothersome bird?
The silent firmament is torn by my song.
From my clouded tower,
I survey the horizons of existence
and nonexistence.

You show me your nascent tenderness.
We teach each other the rudiments
of human kindness, my need
feeding your need to be needed.

Perch, please, with me on the edge
of an apocalypse. Let us open
our gray wings and prepare our flight,
two gray things disappearing
into the gray-lighted distance.

**NIKOLA TESLA'S DREAM OF A DEATH RAY
POWERED BY THE FORGOTTEN WISHES OF ANGELS**

He worked alone with X-rays, hour on hour,
forgot to sleep for days and then collapsed.
10,000 planes flew mute and languid through
pink Serbian clouds. A black ray swept
across their path, and they vanished as souls
floated Northwest toward oblivion.
The angels laughed at Tesla lying cold.
His want to wake was strange, he thought, in dream
lucid as if he had consumed two pots
of strong tea rapidly. This new invention
would dog him, just now when he had no time
for death rays. What would power it?, he wondered,
as he swam the pond behind his father's
parish where he preached a god so strange
as to conceive of matter, force, currents,
gravity, and microwaves. Wishes
of angels. This would be the power source
for his death ray. Forgotten ones, the most deadly.

He woke
and lifted himself.

Saliva stuck

to his dry lips.

He cringed, remembering

angels, and dipped his hands and dunked his head

into the washbasin.

Drops scudded down

his spine—

as he saw planes in flames, smelled death.

WHAT LONELY CONTINENTS

Last night I dreamt of Africa it was beautiful and strange but you weren't there and that made things more difficult even in the unreality of dream made me think Africa really is a desolate place worthy of all our pity how could a continent survive without you I thought and realized Europe suffered the same poverty of you and so was no better than Africa which at least made me happy not to be dreaming I was in Europe but no happier I was dreaming of Africa where the lions yawned with regal indifference the gazelles ran languid with fear and slower than in real life they were sad not to have you there and ran slower thinking maybe you couldn't catch up that's why you weren't but they were just dumb gazelles hoping against reason that you wanted to be but just couldn't which is bullshit as you and I both know try telling that to those stupid gazelles though they won't listen to a word just run lazily along hoping you'll arrive just in time to save them.