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ORISON
BOOKS

Self-Portrait

I am words in a language I don't speak

a dead one

Are
they even words? I've never seen
them carved on any stele unearthed

slashes scorch marks red
ocher months-dried reed

funerary

Never heard
that throat-trill
anywhere else

fricative like the spill
of candle wax over ice

I don't think anyone
ever spoke it

Does it have
an alphabet
or assemblage of
learnable runes

Is that sound the talonprint of an owl

I'm translating into English even now

Burnt and pictosyllabic
stalactite-lit

How do you say in this dead language *Hello*
How do you say *How many days' walk are you*
(whoever you are)
How many days' walk away are you

away

Loathsome Repetitions

It is with great delight and regret I come
to bear unto you

the word *battology*, meaning
"the wearying repetition of a word."

"Battologies of loathsome repetitions," quoth the OED.
"When we pray, let us not battologize."

Let us not battologize but alter
the wounded text
with corrections:

For *absolutely* read
Not so fast.
For *what do you want* replace throughout
Why do you even want.

For *erotic* say *erratum.*
For *erratum* say *exactly as intended.*

———————————————

I will never say the word *battology* aloud.
How long has it now been
since anyone has? Don't you, should you read this, let
its four syllables so much as dry your tongue.

Battologize at your own reckless risk.

Reckless should have been written above as *wreckless*.

For *at your own wreckless risk*, read *I dare you.*
For *I will never say the word* battology *aloud*
read *I have not ceased to battologize, loathsomely, that word;*
its breath has—every second I've been speaking now in writing out to you—
never failed to dry my tongue.
This is my error-riddled supplication. Take it as a talisman, an apotropaic fetish,
an act of idolodulia.

(Battologize *idolodulia* x 5.)

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For *When we pray, let us not battologize*, close your eyes and join with me in prayer:
I cried unto the Lord with my voice;
with my voice unto the Lord did I make
my supplication
Did I make my wrecked and dry-tongued supplication
Did I make my supplication Lord unto thy voice
Into thy voice
Overspeaking and contradicting thy voice

For *supplicate* the correct text would be *Pour out my troubles.*
For *poured out my complaint* the proper version
to be inserted is *shedded out my prayer.*
For *shedded out my prayer* read *prayershreds,*

read *tell him all my problems,* read גֶאְשֶפֹּךְ לְפָנָיו שׂיחִי צָרָתִי לְפָּנָיו אַגִּיד:
For *read*, substitute *supplicate.*
For *Refuge failed me, no man cared for my soul*
please use corrected text
My soul is like earth without water for Thee.

My soul is like earth without water for Thee.
My soul is like earth without water for Thee.
My soul is like earth without water for Thee.

IV: To a Reader

Whoever found your way here, go
on, go on, this is no place to dwell
among syllables and obfuscatory
wants that lurch and halt and fight
all unambiguous naming. Like a creek
self-purifying over stones
whose smoothness it creates
and then commends. Does
meaning sometimes disgust you,
its indefatigable advancement,
swerving around boulders and stormdowned
trunks toward the closural
opening of the mouth? Ambition's
background-running and obsessively
secretly self-correcting program, preoccupied
at every moment by all the ways we may
have accidentally and embarrassingly erred.
Already the latest findings
excise the former, in a redacted
blackout of the previous certainties.
Regardlessly, and purposelessly, be
well, be well, be well, Stranger. Sit here
these five-hundred-syllables-while.
If there were such a verb as *to bewell*,
bewail's near-homophone and antonym.

If there were such a name as Antonym,
a noun as *ante*nym—before the word,
and *of* it, as of a place, a time, a here, a this,
random and deictic Little Squalicum, high tide at 5 p.m.
as of
a faith, a little one. Which chooses
to last by rooting itself
intractably among Coke can and gull feathers, bark-rip
off driftwood, and hollowed-out crabshell,
and words. *Hi, I'm Faith:* windblown voice-over,
surfsuck's precatory bewailing, and
seaweed hung strand by strand over branch
as if deliberately to dry. Go on, go on,
say more to me, Wanter. Hold
your opinions like a crystal figurine,
antique and precious and precarious. Wild blackberries
cling under the four-lane's overpass.
Overpast would be a better name for memory.
That's an antiquated and precarious opinion. Bewell,
bewell, dwell
a brief while here, anonymous
and casual visitor, Antonym, implacably resistant to all name.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bruce Beasley is the author of eight previous poetry collections, including *All Soul Parts Returned* (BOA Editions, 2017), *Theophobia* (BOA Editions, 2012), and *The Corpse Flower: New and Selected Poems* (University of Washington Press, 2007). He has received The University of Georgia Press Contemporary Poetry Series Award, The Colorado Prize for Poetry, and The Ohio State University Press/*The Journal* Award.

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