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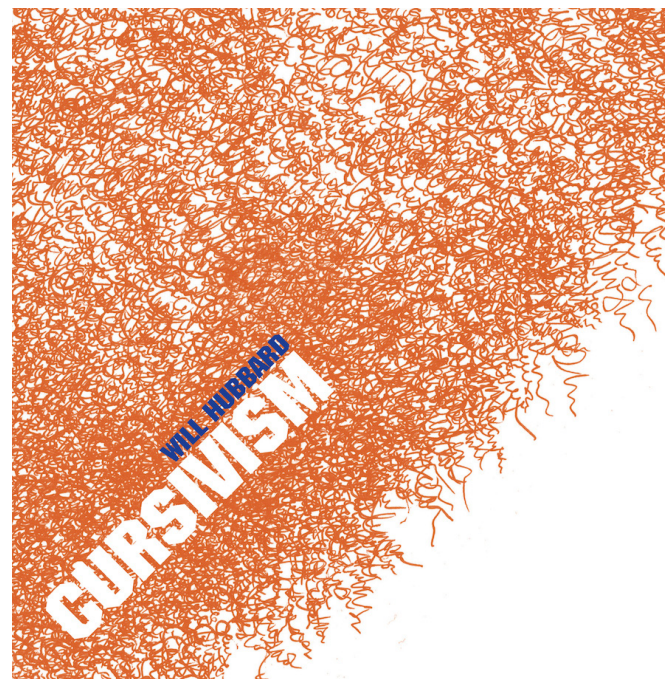
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Cursivism  
© 2011 by Will Hubbard

ISBN: 978-1-933254-79-1

Distributed to the trade by  
Small Press Distribution / SPD  
[www.spdbooks.org](http://www.spdbooks.org)

Available directly from Ugly Duckling Presse  
and through our partner bookstores.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Hubbard, Will.  
Cursivism / Will Hubbard. — 1st ed.  
p. cm.  
Prose-poems.  
ISBN 978-1-933254-79-1 (pbk. : alk. paper)  
I. Title.  
PS3608.U233C87 2011  
811'.6—dc22

2011006066

First Edition, First Printing 2011

Ugly Duckling Presse  
The Old American Can Factory  
232 Third Street #E002  
Brooklyn, NY 11215

Printed in the USA

This book is funded in part by public funds from the New York City  
Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



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WILL HUBBARD  
**CURSIVISM**

for my parents

**CURSIVISM**

1 ::

FINALLY, in the middle of winter, I've caused an orchid to bloom a second time. My father, in the hospital with a blood infection, still implores me not to *catch cold*. Once I carried an orchid, uncovered, many blocks through the snow. Inside, the frozen petals made clinking sounds, like a toast. I called my mother to see if there was anything I could do. *No, no*, she said, *just let it happen*.

ENGLISH POETRY began in the hay. The disturbed dream of a stable-boy. It was mostly the same thing repeated over and over again. During the next five hundred years, the nude female body replaced the name of God Almighty and all its kennings. The breasts, particularly, were repeated *ad nauseum*. They were like almost anything you could think of. But then the sun rose beyond the satin curtains, and the smell of powdered flesh gave way to that of smoke. It wasn't until recently that we washed the soot from all the nude statuary and realized, *Yes, marble does give the illusion of human skin.*

:: 2

3 ::

A CONGESTED FUNNELING calls across the house. Something wrong with the mechanism. Running water moves the air, making it colder near a river or in the path of a wave. When last I removed the cover, the rubber piece that stops the water was decaying. Now I fear it's hanging in the stale darkness like an open flap of flesh. When I compare hardships I know to those I will know, memories of floating on deep water come. The storm that rose from nothing, the fisherman who pulled me out. All the others were eating clams behind a screen.

OFTEN IT IS PART of another world. One can hear it but not see it. Somewhere larger, glass becomes darkness inviolate but allows the free passage of sound. It can be loud when it wants to be. It can taste like gardener's soil. Mainly its companion is the rain. There is hardly ever reason for the two to quarrel. They're the same thing in differing light. In the wintertime, seagulls remind the rain of glass. Evidence that longing remains, even in eternal things.

:: 4

5 ::

ALL DAY A BATTERED delivery truck backs in and out of the garage across the street. The opening is hardly wide enough for its body, but the driver nails it again and again. Traffic at the end of the street builds and releases. Watching the clock-radio, I worry the day will pass slowly. On the nearest power line a robin lands near another, extends its chest, and sidesteps closer. All the worms have browned on the sidewalk, inedible as mud. The truck backs in again. Something about you will be different. A sunburn, maybe.

A MAN WITH NO relatives or friends dies. The cops find him sitting upright in an easy chair, his head fallen forward. They tell a rookie to watch the body while they do paperwork and chat up the neighbors. For hours after death, a body is still capable of movement. In this case, the corpse's head rises slowly as if to address the poor rookie. This is, at least, how he explains why, his first day on the force, he suddenly shot a corpse five times in the chest. The story was related to me second-hand, amid great laughter, in a barbershop.

:: 6

7 ::

NOTHING'S MORE BORING than the sight of your own body. Add a rash or bruise and you have something *partially* interesting. Seeing inside the body, what's close at hand but carefully hidden, would be a terror. The body of another takes it even further, so vile it's almost beautiful.

ANYONE CAN UTTER a string of words in a made-up language. Meaningless speech makes good use of the nose. Like French. But beyond the fun of it, writers of diverse ages and cultures agree: Each vocal sound has a specific energy. The ‘a’ sound in *father* is thought to be the very beginning.

:: 8

9 ::

IN JOHN TRUMBULL’S famous painting, *The Declaration of Independence*, George Wythe appears at the left edge of the frame. In the version reproduced on the \$2 bill, Wythe has been cropped entirely. Some speculate that he fathered a child with his only African slave. Unquestionably, he was the last man to sign the Declaration of Independence. In colonial parlance, a *wythe* was a continuous vertical piece of masonry one unit in thickness. Now we call it a *veneer*.



BEGINNING LATE is useful because you get to see what everyone else is doing first. Especially in elementary school. We were to inscribe our autobiographies into clay tablets for a time capsule. After they were fired, I was taken into the hallway and told my story couldn't be buried with the rest. Among other problems, I'd misspelled my last name. An *e* instead of an *a*. But my mother refused to throw it away, and one Easter I noticed its crude border of tiny swastikas. I'd invented a new shape.

:: 10

11::

MOST OFTEN they are a black silhouette moving in a field of light. We know them by their outline and speed. But the records make constant reference to color and sound. Their observation is a science, like most, for the patient and leisured. In Malta, for example, there's a purple gallinule resting adorably on someone's veranda. Experts die with rarely more than half of the 10,000 names. The rest of us have about 300, but have never written anything down.

AT VILLA TOULA, I secretly see past the bathroom door to where you're crouched, checking the progress of menstrual blood. When you come out wet from the shower I am still only eating an orange.

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13 ::

FOR A WHILE my mother did it by implication. They would lock us out of their bedroom and we'd pound the door with simplistic reasoning. My father and I made a game of hiding her cigarettes. Once he accidentally ran over her salad at a drive-thru. But most often it took place in the biggest and oldest of our long series of houses. The one made of a type of dark-orange, crumbling brick they don't seem to make anymore.

THE WEEK OF my birth in the tropics Harry Mathews wrote with some anxiety about reading Roland Barthes on the island of St. Bart's. He concluded that nothing was wrong except his own *compulsion to find fault, to find significance*.

:: 14

15 ::

THE LONG-AWAITED soccer game would not happen. But it does not stop clean and cleated children from staring out windows all over the city. Someone comes in and suggests they help with baking cookies or washing the dog. The task begins slowly, with somber talk of the need for patience. Soon enough the house is warmer and smells more familiar than ever. Later, a walk around the puddled neighborhood. People stepping eagerly from their houses, breathing in.

THE MOMENT DOESN'T have to be right. Just make sure the waiter takes the bottle of wine to the correct table. Simply pointing will not be enough. Describe the color and quality of her hair, the particular shapeliness of her nose. If you can't see that far just make it up. Imagine how the wine will taste in her mouth rather than in your own. It may be that when she looks over at you she is seeing a bird or a single musical note. Act accordingly.

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17 ::

IN HEAVEN THERE ARE only two food groups. No one has to be annoyed by epicurean friends. She gave me a jar of organic clover honey as a gift. For a week we both took a mouthful in the morning, like medicine. I asked why we were doing it. She said her answer would be too New Age for me. Afterward, I didn't feel any different. But the taste went well with anything, even toothpaste.

IN A CIRCUMSTANCE of utter, detestable futility, you are a knight in command of knights. Call them a *retinue* if you like, but death is still daily, unrarified, like making bacon or slipping into your armor. The god is quiet that would have you survive friends taken brutally with imperfect weapons. Your woman says *to think oneself responsible for everything is not humility* in unaffected French. Yet her husband, the king, still desires the holy acumen of a cup. Even the injured among you move with subtle authority, and round tables keep every man in view.

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19 ::

IT'S NOW COMMON to find what you're looking for. What could have been found only by digression lies at the end of some rather attractive person's inquiry. The two of you never meet, but there are some close calls.

THE ARRANGEMENT and decoration of living rooms is largely timeless. No need to change what you never use. It might be called *classic* for a house's rooms to be arranged in a circle around two staircases, a front and a back. Often one hears *The family outgrew that house*, or *They no longer needed all that space*. In all of this there are delicate pleasures that cannot not be communicated in ordinary language.

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21::

FOR THE MOST PART, poets of the Sung Dynasty held down good jobs in the government and wanted nothing extravagant for their children. If they had a vice it was wine, which for many is not a vice. Their despair did not go further than the expression of absolute sadness, a state short of suicide or violence. You can tell they were sure of themselves by their distaste for modifying clauses.

ONCE IN DESPERATION I cut out the face of the girl I loved from the yearbook and glued it onto the naked body of a woman in a magazine my brother gave me for taking out the trash for an entire September.

:: 22

23 ::

LIKE STORMS OR EQUATIONS, sexual fantasies move through distinct stages toward satisfaction. Occasionally performers are brought together to act them out. It can be tricky. Somebody wants to combine pole-vaulting with a notion they've had since childhood about spermaceti, for example. It is the type of behavior that's hinted at in ancient Greek and Egyptian graffiti. Oftentimes materials are pushed beyond their limits, and grotesque linear bulges appear. This too becomes part of the fun.

AGIRL ONCE served me tea that upon first sipping tasted like nothing. After a few more swallows, a distinct sweetness arose, as of the thin nectar of honey-suckle, on the back of my tongue. I tried to buy some, but men in Chinatown tea shops shook their heads vigorously at the mention of its name. The other peculiar thing was this—if by spoon or finger you made the tea drip slowly into itself, small beads formed momentarily on the surface, then vanished without even the slightest ripple.

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25 ::

MY FATHER ONCE left the sprinkler on overnight and froze an entire dogwood tree. It bowed closer to the ground, where I was. The blanket of golden hay, protecting a few blades of new grass, had frozen too. In the early morning ice absorbs all sound but its own, breaking in hand and under foot. He was already at work, left each morning before the light. When he returned that night the dogwood tree was standing up again, presiding over the side-yard as if nothing had happened.



AN EVENT THAT, were it not to happen in one place,  
would also not happen in any other.

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27 ::

FOR LOVERS, all things are mutable except the  
heavens. Storms are the domain of rage, which is only  
a symptom of love. On a far balcony, a woman in a red  
shirt stands waiting for the cold. Outside his store in  
rural Virginia, my mother's grandfather was split in  
half by a bolt of lightning. I do not know if he was a  
religious man. With a muted exasperation, my mother  
recounts that the quarreling of his sons would soon  
divide the family. She retells the story many times, as  
though it were the exception to some rule.

NOT THAT YOU CAN'T go there. You just can't pass over it on your way to something unprofound. Members of the Irish bardic orders went regularly to prove the sincerity of their desire to communicate. Invalids who slept in its soundless dark were cured somewhat. In other times it was simply an island that could not be reached easily or at all. To go to there was an acknowledgement that curiosity was stronger than habit, itself stronger than fear.

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29 ::

I'M SORRY I PUNCHED your little brother. But guests are sometimes invited over to be made unwelcome. The meeting of generals is excessively polite. Neither will die. Their daughters sleep with the same man, perhaps. One makes him a father and the other shows him desire. Within the small spans I do remember there are smaller gaps which I do not. These are the things that would be unsuitable to discuss with you.

ESTIMATES SUGGEST that a quarter of the time the bone breaks and nothing is done. Pacing about the living room is rarely the culprit, making adults somewhat immune. Sound of the phone ringing, then a stranger's voice. *The child was born two weeks ago, were you told?* In the incubator, the bones of her body are still perfect, albeit a bit soft. The little toes become more human every day. If she feels pain, no one has to know about it. She'll probably never run carelessly through this place, but I rearrange the tables and chairs anyway.

:: 30

31::

THERE IS A LIMIT to how tangled two things can get. But it might feel good to fall and be caught by you. William Yeats saw everything as a series of concentric, downward winding spirals. The sort of unified outlook that leaps in the heart. Did we pass a bathroom on the way in? Not long ago, urine was valuable. You could sell it.

NOWADAYS EVERYONE thinks it's healing. But the old arguments about stunted growth and blindness are still fairly attractive. You hear of people wanting to combine it with other activities. Ironically, by itself it is no longer enough.

:: 32

33 ::

A MOSTLY FORGOTTEN actress has appeared mostly nude on the cover of a popular magazine. It is reported as news in reputable newspapers and on television. Out of the creeping void of time, meaninglessness has erupted. The table is set with good china and our grandmother's silver. We are consumed.

MY FATHER WOULD suggest the family watch *Chariots of Fire* after dinner. Often, there were no convincing objections. The working title of the movie during production was, simply, *Running*. Inspiring music plays while men in white run along a Scottish beach. Though a picture exists of him on the golf course that adjoins that beach, I have no reason to think my father envied Europeans. Sometime in his thirties he seems to have taken up running.

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35 ::

NÂZIM HIKMET SAT thirteen years in a prison not far from his native Istanbul. He found it more conducive to think about oceans and mountains than flowers or gardens. When in solitary confinement he would wait for his own body to warm up the darkness. Eventually, they allowed him one hour a day in the courtyard. He considered cultivating a garden in a tin can. Recalling this later, in bed with his wife, it still didn't seem like a crazy idea.

UP THE STREET a man is disassembling a house using hammer and crowbar. Late into the night, block by block, I hear it coming down. In each of our successive yards I would find chips of limestone embedded in the red clay under patches of moss. My mother called them *fossils*. Once, having unearthed some cryptic shard, I vomited into a boxwood. Ashamed, I shook the mess with a stick, disguising it somewhat.

:: 36

37 ::

IF THE FEELING overwhelms, your lover is being unfaithful. Poets of the Japanese Edo court knew this, and weaved yearning easily into cherry blossoms or hearty autumn grass. For them, moving clouds were messengers enough. Granted, staring out a window at wet asphalt is hardly like listening to a bamboo thicket fill with snow. The feeling of sickness in the morning eases with a day of activity. Returning at night it can transform into a pleasant, vital dream. Only then is the lover listening, hoping against all odds that you will send some sign of conviction through the fickle wind.

MAYBE IT'S BETTER if we don't say our names. In an abridged version of *Around the World in 80 Days* I first read the words *opium*, *Bordeaux*, and *mutiny*. I know a woman who guards her personal information like a hawk. She's not hiding anything, only preserving the power in her name, age, and city of birth. No one has trouble feeling close to her. In fact, there is undeniable appeal in her withholding. It has nothing to do with sex. She simply stays free of everyone.

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39 ::

FOR THREE NIGHTS I wake wet and shivering. There's nothing to do but towel off and try the opposite side of the bed. During the day I feel no particular illness. A doctor friend says *Sounds like the common cold*, laughing. But there is nothing common about the dreams that suddenly wake me. Out on the street someone has been locked from the building. He calls desperately up to his sleeping wife. I want to say to him *Go away from here, please, someone is sick*.

A FRIEND SAYS, *It keeps things moving.* One spills an entire cup a great deal less than could be expected. My last time was in a shoe store as neither customer nor employee, but suitor to the latter. A boy and his mother helped me clean it up. Certain things will always mystify children. Queer behavior of adults. My mother was always leaving unexpectedly for the movies. My father pouring out the first bit of coffee before taking a sip.

:: 40

41::

LORCA IS SURELY talking about him when he says Goya avoids the pinks and grays of the English masters. Oak trees in English rapeseed fields grow queerly. A large tree growing out of a smaller one. For Goya this would have been the main drama. Off in the distance a great deal happens, but there are traditions for that. Who would paint them?



I REMEMBER peeling the skin off grapes and popping them in my mouth and pretending they were eyeballs. Now I wonder if everyone has trouble looking into other people's eyes. Fear and desire are read in a hole, its intimacy overwhelming. Nothing beyond it but blackness, blankness.

:: 42

43 ::

THE YOUNG COUPLE beyond the wall has acquired two dogs, both equally small and miserable, though of different breeds. Over here, I play a little slow rock. The guitar strings make a high-pitched noise when the chords change. This approximates but only slightly muffles the acute, strained barking of dogs beyond the wall. Miserable, alone, they find no comfort in each other.

DESIRE IS AN ETHER drawn up from the spaces in the soil. Hidden flesh, still spoken of, abides within the densest of stone. You are all the leaves that did not fall last autumn. You have hung two years out of the same refusal the night shows a fisherman. He has caught nothing but a small, diseased fish.

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45 ::

WE ARE ALLOWED by the limitations of the human eye to think the edge of a good blade infinitely small. In reality it is just slender enough to cleave the space between skin cells. Aware of my burgeoning creativity, my grandmother gave me a set of razor-sharp whittling knives for my tenth birthday. I promptly made the scar that extends across four fingers of my left hand and stared at the curiosity until it shook. The family was awed that blood could so variously paint four walls of a bedroom.

UNTIL THE SIXTH CENTURY B.C., the Greeks wrote from left to right on the first line, then back from right to left on the next, and so on. The way a marble travels in grade-school friction experiments. I read that you are to be married. The calligrapher wrote my apartment number wrong, but the postman is a friend of mine. He slipped it under the door while I was shaving.

:: 46

47 ::

EVERYTHING about the word *textile* is wrong.

THE OPPOSITE OF BRAILLE, its bumps receive the information of contact. The first time I got drunk I burned the outline of a lighter-head into my arm. In uncomfortably hot rooms I feel the scar pinching the skin's surface. In a fire marshal's advertisement on the subway, the light catches only the edge of a burn victim's netted, drooping cheek. The caption reads *She knows the most terrifying sound a smoke alarm can make is silence*. The sweating man next to me shudders reading it because the information is entering him backwards.

:: 48

49 ::

IN MY DAYDREAM you are a Spanish poet of admirable brevity. As Lorca says, *that a great arsenic lobster could fall on your head* is still irrelevant. What would you have thought if I'd sent a golden apple instead? When we finally meet you get pepper spray in my eye, blaming it on the wind. Grace to be humbled only when you need it.

A PARIS MORTICIAN was once so taken by the beauty of a woman dredged from the Seine that he cast her face in plaster. The Egyptians preferred to idealize the features of their fallen heroes—gold leaf and precious gems fortified the mummy on its descent into the underworld. The slight weight of the wax used in the Middle Ages to capture the faces of dead poets and philosophers gives their appearance a lean, contemplative look. The cast of the woman drowned in the Seine was never identified, but marble copies of the face became popular fixtures in Bohemian households. Today it is the face used to make CPR training mannequins.

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51 ::

TO CONSTANTLY WANT to please is one of the lesser vices. It's on the level of sleeping too much, or driving a foreign car. Many things give an abundance of pleasure without compromising anyone's integrity. They are the things that can be as easily overlooked as contemplated. They are also the things that cannot talk.

RELIGIOUS SERVICES allow us to reckon with hatreds. Forced to attend them every once in a while by family members, I reckon with my deep hatreds of rhetoric and boredom. After forty-five minutes my composure frays and I offer myself to whatever god will transport me away. Paradoxically, in refusing the path of the believer, I arrive at the same cleansing and salvation.

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53 ::

ALL OVER THE EARTH there are miracles. The Moche civilization of ancient Peru worshipped everyday actions, fellatio and human sacrifice among them. Where money exists, it acknowledges the sacredness of an act. The more money, the more sacred. Leonardo da Vinci's mother was a slave girl willed to his grandfather by a wealthy brother. Leonardo's birth made her part of the family. This could be thought of as a miracle in 15th-century Italy.

A FEW DISPARATE STATEMENTS by a dead man have made everything fit together. Explanations come easily to you; eloquence is approached. But still nothing grandiose happens. It is neither hot nor cold in the garage when you take a break to carve soapstone. Fever sets during the night, and in the morning you wake to speak a string of blasphemies. They feel like they are keeping you alive.

:: 54

55 ::

I READ ABOUT a woman who paid a man to rape her. They agreed that her safe word would be *Surprise!* For a month I was lightheaded every time my head moved. I read about dislodged calcium crystals in the inner ear causing benign vertigo. I felt better after that, realizing my safe word is *benign*. When lightheadedness intensifies it becomes dizziness. The room is upon you, something to worry about.

THE INSTINCT TO PERFORM sometimes creates impenetrable boredom for others. A cultivated audience makes allowance for this, thinking dully of love until the performers awaken to their forlorn motivations. Leaving the theater I ask your impressions, but you know to ignore the question. Outside the darkness is not shocking. Ditto the light rain.

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57 ::

NO, IT WAS NOT SELF-LOVE. The sight of the face in the mirror was not beautiful at all. Quite possibly it was the face of a ruinous thing. The face of failure or the bringer of failure. There were people in it, yes. Ancestors who had accomplished nothing of consequence save an unremarkable pittance for unremarkable labor. Their vulgar hope was in the mirror, in the face. One could hardly call such a thing beauty.



THE SPANIARD Miguel Hernandez says *The onion is frost shut in and poor*. Neither of us likes onions, but they are necessary to make the meal any good. Maybe we remember our mother crying over onions. She once insisted the family would always be *middle-class*. We would eat ordinary things, like onions. She looked the same after that, still beautiful, but the kitchen had changed.

:: 58

59 ::

TO WRITE SOMETHING down is both to speak and read at the same time. How confusing. Reading in silence looks like nothing. It feels good because effortless concealment has electric potential. I wonder if the man who read stories to my second-grade class understood what he was saying. To the rest of us the morals were fairly obvious. Even his facial expressions may have been automatic.

IN THE UNDERGROWTH there are any number of ways to go. Small, erratic birds fly there, but no crow dares travel as it wants. Wingless creatures make their way by forgetting others nearby, but the signs are everywhere. Bits of fur, smears of blood and shit. A meal or a moment's rest is a miracle.

:: 60

61 ::

A GOOD DEVICE fails out of fatigue and not out of malice. Comes in waves, subsides all of a sudden. Has a mother and father that fell from use after a great war. Doesn't listen to the sound of the wind. Doesn't mind an occasional blow. Could be made of lesser materials and function as well. Does not look away when I give myself to boring gods. Asks me to remove its clothes to see what's changed about its body. Gets wet fully and without reservation. Enjoys a moment's rest. Takes the baseball game seriously. Has something to hide from everyone. Has had about enough of my bullshit. Reacts pleasantly to a variety of weather. Protests small things like the choice of organ music. Keeps time the way I like it.

SOME YEARS AGO I cast significant doubt on whether my father watched, as he says, the inauguration of John Kennedy from a tree. His recent claim to have attended the 1965 Newport Folk Festival seems even more improbable. Still, his story about a convertible and two coeds from Boston College convinces everyone. I mean, why raise a flag? Even skepticism has its unattractive forms.

:: 62

63 ::

IN THEIR EARLY JOURNALS, Lewis and Clark repeatedly mention that Native villagers would offer their wives or daughters as company during the night. But sometime later Lewis relates that a Native man has stabbed his wife three times for sleeping with one of Clark's officers. The Chief reminds the man that his wife had been offered up during the dance of the masks. There is no mention of the Chief winking at Lewis or Clark as he says this.

HIS ONE BOOK detailed the graveyard shift he'd worked in a mortuary. And once he related the grim details of Ezra Pound's 25 days in a cage outside Pisa. But more of us were drawn to the mold colonies he cultivated in coffee mugs on the classroom windowsill. After school he fought his belly by running lap after lap around the football field, but the only thing that ever changed was the length of his gnarled red beard. He'd shave it, then tell us about vitamins he took to grow it back faster.

:: 64

65 ::

TO WORRY ABOUT the degradation of the materials is obviously absurd. Yet we must feel a certain nostalgia for simple pale pine boards. They hold up fine for a year or so, and then the slight indentation of the grass is a relief for everyone. And I think we'd all agree that the thought of an ash-urn filling slowly with groundwater is not pleasant at all.

HIS FAMILY CALLED from down South looking for him. Someone thought to call me, thinking I knew how to reach you, that you might be away with him. I wanted to help, but you never gave me the phone number up there.

:: 66

67 ::

IN THE PROVINCES tonight they are making love. But for once I'd like to forget the provinces. Tomorrow I will send dispatches and candied oranges and jam with the children. They smile but I know I've failed to teach them anything useful about the tide. There has been no improvement here since your departure. If anything, there is even more dread. I'm sorry I would not let you put your name on the sign. Come home. If you do, I promise we can be partners until the barrel runs out. After that I am walking into the sea and want no voice behind calling me back.

NOTHING WILL LOOK the same when you return.  
Even if the lighting doesn't change. The difference is  
that before you had been there, and now you are not.  
The house is empty.

:: 68

69 ::

IF YOU ROTATE a square 45 degrees, it becomes a  
diamond. There are no constraints on how long a game  
can last, but still the umpire repeatedly calls *Time!*  
Even the elderly are anxious for a foul ball. Notoriously  
impatient, I attended the longest nine-inning game in  
baseball history. My father left at the seventh inning  
stretch, but I kept getting drunk behind the dugout.  
By midnight, hot dogs had run out and I could swear  
the mound was getting smaller. Finally someone hit  
a home run and the lights went off, apparently on a  
timer.

WHEN AN EIGHT-TON sperm whale beached itself and died on an Oregon beach, the Lane County highway patrol decided to blow it up. Local news was on hand, and residents made a picnic of it on the dunes. After all, the accounts of spectators at the Battle of Bunker Hill once spurred an unprecedented colonial unity. And the darting cloud of brown Oregon sand was undoubtedly magnificent for a moment. But when whale flesh began pummeling cars a quarter-mile away, a panicked absurdity took hold of the telecast. Those who weathered the storm walked somberly down to the beach. The stinking head-half of the beast remained intact, and had to be buried.

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71 ::

HUMAN BEINGS SPEND one third of their lives asleep, a great deal of which happens in adolescence. It was said that Frank O'Hara never wanted to sleep. When he was run over by a dune buggy in 1966, the attendant surgeon scratched his head. *No one should be dying of these injuries.* It is a story that could be stitched into a pillow.

IN THE MORNING clothes are weightless. The body is clean and doesn't mind being covered up. Around midday it is cool and sweatless, but you are inside where there are machinations. In strip joints it is always a little cold, making the bodies firmer and easier to look at. Audience members want to take off their clothes too, but it's illegal. At night the stifling weight of clothing comes to represent many anxieties. Piled up, the discarded garments are eager to dry out. The skin, too, breathes for what feels like the first time.

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73 ::

THERE WERE a great many things Raymond Roussel thought himself capable of writing but never did. Raymond Roussel was capable of writing a great deal of things he never did. A great many things were possible for Raymond Roussel that he never attempted. Lesser minds came along and accomplished them, attaining great success. Lesser writers came along and attempted what Roussel thought below his capacity, attaining greater success than he ever did. The writing Roussel thought below him was accomplished by lesser authors who achieved greater success.



RAIN FALLS ON the window in the ceiling, a banal sound. Without thinking, I answer, *No, you have never worn such a beautiful dress.* It has been a season of usual rains. Earlier today I placed flowers on your father, an old habit of mine. Then I read gravestones for a while and walked home the long way. Remember the long way? Over the river twice?

:: 74

75 ::

WE'RE IN AND IT'S BEAUTIFUL. You don't even need a flashlight. We'll sleep in an old dry rowboat. Truly, there are no caves like the caves of the sea. I drift off to you whispering phrases like *the old country* and *My shoes, for once, fit just fine.* We are absent from each other's dreams, but in the morning two seagulls float up on the tide. No one says anything about the weather, or the price of almonds.

YOU ARE ALONE when you see the apparition. It will not show itself when others are around. It appears at the most terrifying moment because at that moment you are the most terrified.

:: 76

77 ::

TO NOTICE THIS particular time of day one must be detained. Quickly it becomes black. Seeing it from a window, the chilling feeling of coherence does not come. Instead the desire underneath the desire to obtain comes to mimic love. You turn back to the house, to the people. It all happens in the blue dark light at day's end.

I DREAMED A GOD was teaching me to paint clouds.  
He said, *You paint them in black paint, and from the  
earth they appear white.*

:: 78

This first edition of *Cursivism* was printed in an edition of 1,000 on partially recycled FSC-certified paper by McNaughton & Gunn in Saline, Michigan. It was designed and typeset by Anna Moschovakis and Linda Trimbath using Arno Pro and Gotham Rounded. Covers were printed by The Printing Gallery in New York City. The cover illustration is by the author.

Ugly Duckling Presse is a non-profit publisher based in Brooklyn, New York, specializing in poetry, translation, lost literature, experimental nonfiction, and books by artists.

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