

fluke



flying into Chicago,
Fourth of July
it's 9:15 p.m. and
guess what?
dusk is settling
the fireworks are starting
we are sinking down into
a land of light

little stunted bursts
decorously exploding
over grids of duller versions
of the same light
beautiful
free from property lines
and dividing marks
blooming across plots and roads
every neighborhood
not just downtown

they're still exploding
when I'm on the train
beautiful time-out
beautiful broccoli tops
reflected in the tall
black city glass
—but this train is going too slowly

I need to go faster,
to skirt the fourthofjuly congestion
in the belted middle of the city
instead we cut the brakes
and coast into it,
slowing to an idle
stupid City of Chicago
exact wrong time to come home
exact right time to come home

El Stop



ugh
my neighborhood
my El stop
narrow g-string platform
tipping me into oncoming trains
and steep steep stairs
so I need the
greasy poles and hand rails I try not to grab
surfaces everywhere pickled
in urine and nicotine
soaked into spongy concrete
smells assault from every corner
water puddling in dips and warps
in the tiled floor
broken clock: 7:39 every day
dirty donut shop
brownish windows

as I emerge
I walk over endless hardened
dark grey rounds of gum
flattened like raindrops on the pavement
to my scary bus stop outside
or my scary parking lot

Ode to the City of Chicago East
Monroe Street Parking Garage

We are all animals in this zoo
although we realize it not
(A gross cliché, I know, it's true
but indulge me in my bitter thoughts)

Every morning, late or early
we line up to fill the concrete cage
Morning faces bright or surly
tired or showing commuter rage

Slam our cars through underground burrows
—the sweaty concrete moistly hot
Walls swollen wet, gouged with furrows—
all to find our parking spot

Screeching brakes are our caged cries
we emerge from over-heated cars
Sounds echo loudly round the sties
morning radio bounces from the doors ajar

A human voice, a monkey shriek
(you can almost hear it, listen to the calls)
Phantom ape yell or birdcall meek
echoes empty round the smelly walls

Leaving, our feet the working hours chime
at my back clack insistent heels
The walls drip with moisture, ticking time
footsteps amplified behind me peal

It all conspires to make me think
that the most annoying sound I ever hear
(These mornings when life feels dark as ink)
is Time's wingéd chariot hurrying near



Unreachable Inside
a Room*



oil stains



oil-stained parking spaces
faded, overlapping shades of stains
(one fresh wet spot)
all slightly north of center

they are like my
clean, stained underwear
faded, overlapping shadows of blood
all slightly north of center
(one fresh wet spot)

haiku



winter chicago
cars are round salty peanuts
grey encrustation

my usual spot on Lake Shore Drive
the far left lane
—mine because it feels safe,
nestled against the concrete divider
although when the divider first grows from
the ground
just inches to the left,
far too close
I see myself crashing headfirst into concrete
clap hand to chest with a gasp
then come to, shaking my head—
tonight I see suddenly focused in front of me
an ambulance

a lighted stage
a traveling show
the fluorescent interior revealing the tableau
Dead Christ
the patient draped with white sheeting
propped on pillows
his lean dark
bearded angled
face closed
not wracked with pain, though
he gestures once with his head
—although maybe that was a pothole in
the road
mostly he is still

a bored nervous acolyte sits behind him
facing me — staring at me
fair-skinned blond EMT
I think she saw me flinch (at the concrete)
and assumes I can't stand the sight of this
but in fact I can, I'm thrilled
Now I am frozen, waiting,
not wanting to disturb this window
I've stumbled upon
(arranged for my viewing)
I try to not let her know how hard I am
looking

I follow the ambulance
protecting it from uncaring drivers
and casual shocked glances,
from those who would not check their momen-
tum
give it the respect due
protecting it in its nakedness its vulnerability
the curtain flung back
on this precious gift
this glamorous scene

I follow the ambulance
but I am too close
too greedy,
a tail-gating voyeur,
adding my headlights to the illumination
picking this man out in the dark
too thrilled
I want to keep this for myself
my moment
my momentary illumination
my present
his quiet face pulling me along obediently
behind

the ambulance begins changing lanes
and I change lanes right along behind it
still holding too tightly,
until I suddenly guess
which exit, which hospital, it is heading to,
loosen my grip and let it keep going
without me,
let it keep changing lanes alone,
slowing as I speed by.
I cross myself again wave goodbye
and wish good luck
to the glowing pinspot
this ambulance would be
on the black and gold map of Chicago
from above
as it slows and curves smoothly to the right,
turning off the road

* Title is a nod to both Philip Larkin and Barbara Pym, R.I.P.
Andrea Mantegna (1431 - 1506), [Dead Christ](#), 1480-90.
Can you spot the wee pun?

