

Number Among

Tom Snarsky



©2017 Tom Snarsky  
All rights reserved  
Epigraph Chapbook 001  
[epigraphmagazine.com](http://epigraphmagazine.com)  
Edited by Nicholas Bon

# NUMBER AMONG

Tom Snarsky

*for K*

!

# Mouth And Society

The following is  
a tutorial for  
the moon: how  
to hold it

how to suffer  
its dumb face

how to walk  
into the belly  
of the sky  
with no armaments

# Wish

My trick is to pretend  
To be a person you might want  
To know  
In the initial stages  
& then to fail  
At being that  
In a million small meticulous ways  
Until our century  
Finally passes

# So As Firmly To Embrace The Jaw

One of the conditions of poetry is wishing

You were doing anything else

Like maybe acting so people could love you

Or fucking a lodestar

I decided I would write a screenplay

But then pretension vibrated my bowels so hard

I could not move forward

The borrowed comic book hitting the floor

Still thinking about Francesca Woodman

I am sorry for suspending time

This is just a cheap way of stalling desire

The only one I know that kind of works

It's entirely different not doing this with thumbs

There's a qualitative difference

In the duration



No one is vacuuming so

Someone might be listening

Balthazar Getty is in my head this week

Right next to you in the spatialization

Of the evening

I've decided to ignore the blinking light

The feeling of my hands touching

Four different textures at once is

Alarming

Like Michel Houellebecq's photographs

Both within fiction and without

I am joking with the tuberose

But not with you

Never with you

I am sorry that the moonbeams are so sad

The way this light arcs

Portentously

Like a condition or a lit fuse

It's entirely different not doing this

In the duration

Where the celebrity chef is alone on stage

And there is a single

Solitary light

The only one I know that kind of works

Right next to you in the spatialization

Of the evening

# Love Poem Composed Under The Influence Of Keiji Haino's *I Said, This Is The Son Of Nihilism*

& there in the marbled timeline we each extended a branch to the empty  
Tomb, inviting love  
To decompress over the hills. His fat tongue & dark hair were equally  
Inexcusable, but not to me. I didn't listen  
When his sovereign silence importuned me  
With its questions, their insane detail  
Accreting a report to be inscribed on the plastic case of a budget drone,  
Flown up & up until its innards froze & it fell relentlessly  
Into the sea.

Sight gives a birth but takes it back. The chaste maroon  
He knew me for was a neon sign I'd switched off. I couldn't maintain  
The underside of a leaf—that lighter  
Green, shaded & veined,  
Riddled with stomata (from the Greek στόμα, *mouth*) that must remain open  
To the air & its poisons  
To give water.

# Experimental Spotlight

I'm holding this basket way out

Over the river and it's got

Precious goods that may be alive

So if I drop the basket that I am

Holding way out over the river

I will be forced to tell

A story to the lover

On the other bank

# Alexander

You smoke outside and you don't  
Buy cheap cigarettes. A mother is born  
As you walk away. The city thoughts  
I'm thinking right now, the morbid  
Feelings I've cloistered in my dumb  
Paws. You are wounded  
And that makes it worse. Can't talk  
Directly about the porcelain damage  
But it surrounds you, close to (not  
Inside) the bone. Tuesday will be  
Next week and still I'll hallucinate  
Sudden butterflies, an outstretched  
Hand, a body swap and two bullets.  
I never pegged you for a sinner  
So I'll handle any dirty work as the fog  
Encroaches, on the heels of the birth-  
Day song. Imagine we grow old in this  
Humidity, next to everyone else and  
Also alone, breathing a thick wet  
That mothers know and that I have  
Been tangoing with for your last  
Nine years. Mon agonie douce—  
La vôtre, je ne la connais pas bien.

# Caritas Gemini

I.

The dog sprinted full-bore into the field &  
Was gone forever from the present tense

He turned into a stack of love letters  
Scribbled on postcards with addresses  
All over the world but mostly in Europe  
To be read by whoever found them

Actually they were music boxes with  
Nothing written on them at all  
Each one a shrine to claustrophobia  
& the cleverness needed to write music

II.

My reology is just a smooth pear  
I first saw under a prescriptive light  
In a nightclub full of people I loved &  
None of whom had yet learned my name

They were all mauve without apology so  
I dripped out the door & into the night  
Singing their songs in my cracking voice  
Until I found a dirt path that led to a field

With the redundancy of color & with love  
I ran into it headlong like a black hearse

# After Webern

A beautiful boy died in a lamppost  
And we will stick with this result  
Through the serial woods, carrying  
A torch and a body that's not his  
Because his was incomplete. When  
We reach the cliffs, I will give you  
Such a hard time, and I'm sorry for that.  
It's the light that does it, I think—  
The glow is like his voice took aim  
At no one but hit me somehow,  
Square in the face, as it happens.



# Traklish

*after Thomas James*

I.

A classically trained injury has befallen us.  
The blind boy lives with me now—  
His muscles dance in my hair.

II.

I distrust American suicides.  
What if they're just  
Burning branches no one has named?

III.

I am unclean in a city.  
The city is the color of asters.  
I forget the rest.

IV.

A woman leads her horse along the road  
And reads him with a tracking gaze.  
He translates the weeds and the guardrail.

V.

After everything, death is still  
Somehow a surprise—  
A frozen rabbit pulled from a hat.

# A Classification Of Wounds

Totally disconnected, we await  
the early dark, when blood becomes  
the color of all liquid in low light.

There is a standing order to amass  
all the different darks, to wait  
until the sum of them reveals its char-

acter, which is to say its preferences,  
which is to say the popping sound  
the jaw makes at a certain angle.

Color TV must've felt like this, although  
not at first—only after it had been  
around awhile, out in the open, bullied

on the playground in full view of  
the others. O, I will not transcend this  
rudely empty house. Nor will it me.

# Brutal Monologue

Reason is cruel but it isn't real  
But it is so maybe I'm confused

I'll wait this one out in a cool  
Place until you get it all figured

Out I said but then my collarbone  
Got ripped out by the Nothing-

Ness and I was left with no choice  
But to engage  
(It was silly to think

There was any other way this  
Could go, but your mild eyes did

Give me all kinds of silly ideas)

# A Brand Of Quietism We Can All Hang Our Heads On

Idea: *ownership* is a refrigerator with designs on my selfhood. Yours too. I can't explain it, I just know

that in English, there is a difference between “this poem has an argument” and “this poem is having an argument”

and the ghost puppet judge is waiting just around the corner to decide which formulation

obtains in this case.

# Frustrated Observer

The thin trail of slime  
that observation leaves  
is a pillar of our several  
ways of communicating  
with one another, & then  
the distance is only  
a small part of its life,  
an etching by a silver-  
smith whose entire  
family is dead but who  
smokes only Newports  
in your dad's garage,  
which he knows his  
way around like a fine gob-  
let or a cheap sword you  
would never have known  
was made of real silver.

# Mitre In Three Scenes

I.

The vestal virgins yawn in agate.  
My life decisions have felt theoretical  
For a long time, martyred as they are  
By the dizzy moon.

II.

Historians,  
The only honest people we have  
Left, scour the Earth hoping to find  
The hidden toenail of the mind.

III.

This recipe calls for silence,  
Warmth, and the kind of tomatoes  
You only see on television: blister  
Red, fresh as an argument.

# A License To Sell Hair Tonic To Bald Eagles In Omaha, Nebraska

It's a chemical—that much you expected—  
but the worried trees haven't yet bought in-  
to the weekday morning television stories  
claiming it's also a curse. What to do when

consensus is not forthcoming: dry the rain-  
bow and haul its desiccated flesh to the  
autopsy room. Kill the one (which is a man-  
y) and save the many (who are hopelessly

one).



# Lucky Country

On a playground, one of the  
Biggest fears is misplacing  
Or getting misplaced. Stop  
And take stock: how many  
Friends did we have in this  
Universal year, and how many  
Friends had we the right to  
Expect? Figures are tumbling  
Into the margins again, down  
A greased slide, way too fast.  
You might think it's cinnabar,  
But no, it's green: that color  
Of digits, that color of feasts.

# The Archives Of Truth Written In Letters Of Blood

This is not an epistolary dream—  
Maybe you'll like the negations better

You & I are far from actuality  
& the tightrope we usually walk

Together  
I have never lied to you but I have

Certainly made mistakes  
I never told you about

Like for example when I said *Truth is*  
*Like hearing a voice you cannot read*

# Bad Argument

Summer ear and some're gone away  
to the forge. Eerie mandate of form. An  
echo lessening their sense of dread.

They sing together like contraband  
in a hotwired hotel full of guns.

The reverb makes you disbelieve  
& rightly so. Beware validity:  
its spleen, its dire meat of sure repose.

The only meat that bleeds itself a shell.

# Erratum

*Underthought* as in *underfoot*, not  
*Undercooked*. Dry snow, not wet meat.

Images are culpable if thought is  
Infinite, like we sometimes imply.

To hold that all can be presented  
Again, with minimal complication,

Underappreciates the way dry snow  
Hides water from the subtle boundary

Of a phase transition. Melt, refreeze,  
Step on, step over. Get out of the way.

# Poem After Lurlene McDaniel

A cottage with a river sunning  
its dark doors. The winter of polio  
again. Cryptic animal light source  
beneath the wounded bed calls

the shadow to another harbor.  
Fleeting trees illumined by a  
milquetoast murder glow.  
Killing them daily, like radishes.

# Real

Imagine composing every kind of music  
& then the elixir wears off & you're you again

& you is a black paper gift bag the universe  
used to give itself to itself in a humdrum im-

pulse buy kind of way before it (the music)  
melted into the background of the best

promo video for a well-traveled semi-pro  
avant-post-left air guitar quintet ever made

||.

# Malign Vigilance

Tremolo to begin:  
The long thighbone  
Humming its secret  
Tune, bullet point,  
Septum fracture  
And the bitter hawk  
Swiping the black  
Of the sea. Humility  
A nightlight with no  
Replacement bulb.

Smokestack an-  
Tonym loving you  
Like a horse race  
Out of sight of the  
Painted steel. De-  
Relict eye music a-  
Gain. Make it hurt  
My inner ear with  
A piccolo of rivers  
And no warning.



# Cairn

Dominability sees  
an opening in gloom  
for the purplest flower  
to shoot up  
between the rocks  
& ask questions later

# Cassette Tape

You come from anxious stock:  
daughters in the pharmacy, love  
sealing the wool at centigrade.

How many woozy lambs would it  
take for you to fall in love with  
sound? It follows sharply through

the ravine, on your coattails like  
mildew on the fine morning. His  
hand burns with seeds, the kind

that fall into the soil and dissolve  
without a word. One foregone  
conclusion is he's messing you up

with winter; another is he's singing  
with that wet kind of fear you like.  
It is absolutely not necessary to make

that choice at this time; you should  
know, though, that time is likely  
to forge a decision and pass it off

as yours, without your permission  
or so much as a passing glance.

# Sedate Scheme

O humble mithril  
Regimented morals  
Knife lines in bark

Sleep durably  
Together out of time

Write a wind song  
Scored with motion

A harvest of metal  
Where the grain  
Awakes transformed

# Jean-Joseph Surin Wins The Spelling Bee

Perdition: P-E-R-D-I-T-  
Ion, Townsend avalanche,  
Gravity current snowslip,  
No-slip condition's exception,  
Downgrade to the no-  
Penetration condition, more  
Free in parallel, resolving in  
Parallel keys, gin and tonic,  
Sloe gin, slow to begin,  
J. J. Surin, covered in shit  
& calling to God, in real life  
& in Penderecki's opera.

# Hinterland

Crying makes me feel so stupid

The warmth behind my eyes is a lot

Like the unhelpful

Transcendental impulse

Unavoidable & burning forth

Before language

Or maybe just a metaphor for living now

Sight

That old Protestant sense

Depleted & blurred

(THALES, triumphantly:)

With water

# Poem In Which Quentin Meillassoux Has A Beautiful Dream Of Total Silence And Drools A Little On His Favorite Pillow (The One With The Green Stars On It That Smells Like Lavender)

I'm looking for a  
Word

Like "speculation"  
But for listening

Something immemorially old  
But still technology

To flow "through the ears  
From an alien stream"

To calm by receiving and  
Recoiling in equal measure

To be semelfactive but servile  
In the fever of isotopes

How long until  
I have to sandblast this word

Off the guardrails and  
Swingsets and rivulets

Until I give it to someone from  
Whom I will not get it back

Not theft only  
A forgetful aperture a

Specter of pauses  
Held in kind by the presence

Of the victim

# Prayer To The Shoulder Wound Of Christ

On Sunday I get drunk & buy every book by René Crevel  
That I can find on Amazon. This act of bourgeois shamanism  
Is meant to help, even though I know that all our actions  
Will eventually fade into a calm, clean, & moonish dark  
With no images to speak of.

Still, the fear continues. When  
I serve you a mouth in the dark, you don't even pretend to act  
Surprised anymore, which stings. The mouth being, of course, our  
Lord's, & the surprise being that of indomitable finitude peeking out over  
The ledge.

Being drunk, I am not worried about overdraft fees  
Or the fact that I haven't read a book in months; I am only worried  
About the sufficiency of bisexuality, the lantern of flesh poised  
In the seat of the soul, & the way pouring itself pours in mid-breath  
On occasion. In these moments, history becomes a lavishness  
That brutality  
Cannot afford. Or a slavishness. Or a woozing of the heart & mind.

When the broken leg is so broken that thought stops  
At the emerging redded-white (& for me it does), or when the shoulder  
Decouples (flesh from flesh, flesh from bone, bone from dark)  
& forms a new, looser unity,

every second in me burns to ask

The Question:

How many universes have there been? How many  
Have contained you? What are we to make of the sex at this impasse?  
It would be wrong to limit ourselves

to one set of colors, but  
That was never what the snow was asking us to do. It wanted,  
Simply, a myth—one that we might buck the trend

& tell our children.



# Tithe

Once the red float.  
Carpentry. Serial number  
On a faun.

Illogic. Heightened  
Senses. Metastasis on film  
Would be what?  
Would be sub-  
Terranean, going under still.

Thickets of youth

Grasping.

# Untitled Film

Flyover of the huntsman, crouched  
brutally on the outcropping, looking  
small with his hands invisible in his  
big cloak. His head is in its usual place.

He's not alone. Sound waves at ex-  
tremely low levels cut through him  
constantly, to say nothing of light;  
he is a dwelling in inconstant motion.  
The minor streams he steps through  
and the trees he ignores all murmur

through his spine, brain, fingers, eyes.  
When the moss catches his attention,  
his step hitches, the profound green  
jolting him from his own high body.

# At The Waterbed Factory

No rifles allowed.  
Things are work-  
ing as they should  
on sluttish time.

The eternal re-  
turn of the same  
    is happening  
right this second.

High-frequency  
welding makes  
limerence come  
and go without

a sound.

# Untitled

*Authenticity* is another word for acting

Like acting is somehow less than crucial

To the success of our enterprise of being

A good & bloody pulp of text messages

To you

*yep nameless name yep hourglass*

I said our vows in a quiet topography &

Market forces built us a bridge to youth

# Many, Many Tickled Parsons

Ramified. So speechlessly ramified. I owe it to the sun-dry real to top off my I with cold feet; here they are doing other work. On the level of the consonant I feed into the dew. Let this all be memorandum, full stop, silly habit. An arbitrage wipes my name away from the base point. I smother these periods for *you*.

# Vacuity

Empty, but tense. I lifted  
the idea “art is shelter”  
from somebody with limpid  
bones. There's no manic edge  
to draw back from, no great  
systematic doubt to heave  
through the windshield—I  
lost the wherewithal to call  
it a beautiful moon, spongy  
& fair. The attention I have  
spent on this is like garbage  
slinking through a river of milk.  
The long, pedestrian sigh vers-  
us an anagram of dreaming.

# Stark / Grace

*[¿]Does it throb with live interrogation...*

—Anne Boyer

*...on this reef of earth [/] Inclement and inhuman[?]*

—Herman Melville

A free mandibular decision  
to drink the wreck.

Whole coasts of outer love  
ringed with wet roads

clasp the fortitude of  
fathers. “Beachy Head”

off *20 Jazz Funk Greats*.  
The ocean keeps asking

its question: groundwater  
interrogated hourly, off a

cliff. Poet tricks of yesteryear.  
The crest in a golden fire.

It feels sick to stomp verbs  
like notions or grapes,

both gifts from you I  
hoarded with similetic

caution. Your playbook  
drowned. I signed it first.

////////////////////

Between the between and  
afterlife, there's a hinge.

A poll of the body. In-  
formation I'm indebted to.

Without any dead-  
lines, I climb the hill,

parallel to grass, born  
into its mangy secrets.

A perilous adventure  
disguised in a country



accent. Identify yourself  
with anything big enough

and nettles will fall from  
the sky. You asked me if

“platoon” had any syn-  
onyms, and of course I

kept quiet. I pretended  
to forget the question.

////////////////////

Corset pull in the dream  
marina. Lack of evidence.

The defense is doing just-  
ice to repeated actions.

Someone is floundering  
after applause. We don't

know who. Choreography  
in your mixtape. Multiple

media. So many brilliant rays.  
We like what we like and

we butcher the apostate.  
A jury box bored through

with malice aforethought.  
We can't just *be* enemies.

To ask the judge a clarify-  
ing question, first you must

climb the seaside mountain.  
Tell me what you find there.

# Way Too Far

Dread biting your shoulder.  
The mass grave statistics  
Are never in time to hear  
The harpist's tune, which  
Rings like a bell shattered  
By the flat-mindedness of  
Flawless desert, where your  
Father lives. Read the sign:  
His nuptials were a prison  
Of cosmology, the fleshly  
Guilt of one entangled in  
Becoming without having  
Prepared an airstrip for its  
Arrival. This means you run  
Out of runway, going way too far  
To land unscathed, or ever.  
Then all we can do is mourn  
And ask our safer questions.

# Griptide

How did your day glow?  
Too movies for the other side?  
Too aspic to rise?

Whereunto the division, after promise  
of cold stuttered hand, a fixed rain,  
some plums in the shed. No argument.

Missal bower hanging over the karst  
sings listwise to the tripwire.  
Mixed question marks.

# Crimped Neon

There is no  
semaphore here.

Depth in general  
running around

the clock. Thorn-  
iness happens

every day  
you're alive.

# Widow Code

I mistook your body  
For a flood & died in it

Every decision is insane  
N'oubliez pas ça

The secret admirer  
Walks out from the mist

& takes you  
As his only prisoner

You have four options  
None of them are pretty

# In The Foreheads Of Dreams

Plains of eternal beings  
& metaphors of light

It is difficult to understand  
Skin & the time it takes

To collaborate with flowers  
I slackened my body until

The whole expanse pudged  
Into doves

The explanation  
Drove him home & didn't

Kiss him goodnight  
This poem should end

With "day" & so I'll make it:

I love you  
Happy birthday

# Frost Dream Theorem

Throw this poem hard against a wall

How many photographs survive 22 years

Gather all on one side & shove up

The recoil is the fastest, coldest part

When I lived up there in Dream Alley I knew

Dozens of people willing to bind the Book

The pool in the secret cave of it

Axioms of us like "sex", "food",

"Crystallography"

The king of night watching sophistry cartoons

An angular pill does just as much

To offer calm

Throw this poem hard against a door

Enough times that someone has to answer

I think it would be best to continue



With the burden of an overheated moon

Hanging slackly off the left shoulder

Proof of an arid photograph we could hide

In & call it an accident

How many poems survive 22 years

Hold them all in one harried mass

& shove up



Poems in *Number Among* have appeared in the following publications, sometimes in different forms: *H\_NGM\_N*, *fluland*, *Eunoia Review*, *Metatron*, *Black Fox Literary Magazine*, *HVTN*, *Sick Lit Magazine*, *foam:e*, *minor literature[s]*, *Five2One Magazine*, *TXTOBJX*, *Leveler Poetry*, *concīs*, *Strange Poetry*, *uncle ken presents*, *Something Zine*, *M58*, *Wu-Wei Fashion Mag*, *Bitterzoet Magazine*, *1947 Journal*, *Peeking Cat Poetry*, and *Random Sample Review*.

Thanks to all of the editors of these publications, and especially to Dimitra Ioannou, editor of *aglimpseof*, for permission to include "Stark / Grace".

Tom Snarsky teaches mathematics at Malden High School in Malden, Massachusetts, USA. His long poem *Centurion* is updated monthly at *aglimpseof*. He lives in Braintree, Massachusetts, and tweets [@TomSnarsky](#).