

this human noise

poems

john sweet

regret

you start by hating
who you are
and who you aren't

you listen to three
teenage girls in the middle of
the street
screaming at each other

you watch the baby
sleep through it

think about the sister of
someone you used to
consider a friend

about her husband hitting
black ice on the highway on
a february morning

the truck that
destroyed his car

the way you haven't
seen the sun
for three days now

your fingers cold on
the first day of june and
your car sitting dead
in the driveway

your wife
visiting her family
two hours away and
without the promise of
return

all of the days
you've wasted not
telling her you
love her

kay sage resurrected on easter sunday

dead leaves in the
first days of spring and the
sunlight showing where exactly
things have gone wrong

the names of objects lying exposed
between the
shadows of bones

and there is digging in the dirt as
a symbolic act
and there is the thing itself

addiction or starvation or
the simplicity of standing lost in
a clean white room

of staring without recognition
at your own past

and what we have in common
i think
is the need to be clean

the need to shape a language from
flesh and bone and
now that i've made it past 27
what i fear is being dead at 44

at 49

what i fear is growing old and
all of the useless anger
that goes with it

all of the sad fucking injustice
that i'm powerless against

the unbearable weight of
motion

letter to michael

cold white light and the
shadows of powerlines and
the illusion of motion

the names of forgotten lovers
that no longer sound
like prayers

the names of seven children
found murdered
in a house in california

the names of
my own children

everything precious and
so easily destroyed

absolution

you have choices
he says

you can either write to hide
or you can write to reveal

or maybe he says nothing

the machines are silent
but the sound
in my head enormous

the clock on the wall
pointless

and maybe what he does
is lie in the
bed without moving

maybe what he does
is die

it seems like i
remember it this way

obvious poem for obvious reasons

the snow melting at the end
of february and
the garbage revealed

the skin peeled back to
find the cancer

can you taste it?

ashes and black blood in
the back of your throat

a boy with a gun and
another one dead

four years old and his mother
on her hands and knees
and the sound she makes as
the rope is pulled tighter

the way he just lies there
while the television blares in
another room

his silence
which says everything

lust

always these same fucking streets
with these same silent houses

the way you
mother's boyfriend swore he'd
kill you if you told

the dull pain of sunlight
or the simple bliss of getting stoned

my hands
which were too small to hold
all of your pain

such simple acts of failure

mural

or you hate your mother
or your father or
maybe both

you slash your wrists at
the age of sixteen

blow your brains out eleven years later

all of these brutal attempts
at self-expression in a world filled
with battered children and still there is
the flight of birds

the silence of empty highways in the
last purple light of september evenings

and later it's the winter of '56 on fireplace road
where pollock watches his studio
from the back door

waits without hope for his hands
to reinvent the world

and you tell me that
you could never stand his work
and that those who kill others
deserve to die themselves

and you're found swinging in the room
of hanged men in the week before christmas
almost half a world away from your home

and when i'm fourteen
i approach morrison like i would a god
and when i'm twenty-five i can
finally see him as pathetic
and there's a woman in a small town i no longer visit
who will never forgive me for this

there are the men who
fathered her children then left her

and maybe the children hate them
or maybe they just don't care

maybe a two year-old girl in another neighborhood
is locked in a heated room

in the middle of august and left to die

and you tell me that this is what
you expect from welfare mothers and then
you talk about the niggers who live
down the street

about how you're not prejudiced
but you believe in the truth
and it's a song i've been living with
my entire life

it's the man downstairs
teaching his wife to bleed

it's my childhood spent in the watery light
of a dozen anonymous bars surrounded by
false prophets who can no longer
stand what they've become

and you are found on your balcony
dead of an overdose
or you're found in your living room
or maybe you get yourself clean
only to end up shot to death
in front of your home

and your blood is real
and spilling everywhere and
twenty years pass before i wake up in
the middle of the night to the sound
of my son crying

i have nothing to offer him
but the past

the need to sleep

in the stand of dead and
dying trees behind
the gas station where no one
is raped and nothing
is loved

south down
any number of pitted grey streets
past empty houses and
crying children

past starving artists and the
plastic bags caught in weeds and
the cigarette butts ground
without mercy into brown lawns

or the sky where it gets
caught in february's branches

the river where the
drowning boy is
always being found

where this
fourteen year old girl is last seen
by two of her friends and
what if all she leaves behind is
one mudstained sneaker?

what if the killer looks like
everyone you've ever known?

nothing in this world has
any meaning
beyond the obvious

blind in the hall of mirrors

not a war
but a stolen child

a house set on fire while
the baby sleeps

your letters
which you sign *love*
and the fact that you're gone

the way the dogs lap up
jezebel's blood

the way dismas is forgiven
then crucified

his eyes
which the crows devour

his savior
who dies beside him

this desert we call home

dreaming the virgin mary

sunlight on the act of rape

blue shadows across
naked flesh
and she is saying she
loves him

she is crawling to where
the boot has crushed
the baby's skull

to where the face of god
has appeared in
the mess of human frailty

a miracle he says
and then places his hand
to her wetness

when the baby is born addicted

what is the song when
the baby is born addicted
and who buys the
flowers?

and when the fever breaks
i will find you
where the weeds begin to swallow
the highway

i will hold you as
the birds fly from your
outstretched hands
but who will close their eyes
and count to ten?

who will be the first
to approach the body broken
at the water's edge?

and you're tired of choking on
my questions
and i'm tired of
starving on the answers

my wife turns away
from both of us and in
the back seat of a moving car
in a town too much
like my own
the baby opens its eyes

all it knows to do
is scream

ash wilderness

and when you can no longer
win the war
you start raping the prisoners

start shooting them dead in their cells
or hanging them in the courtyards

letting the crows have their eyes

small victories
to give to your children and
what your breath smells of
is rancid meat

what your lover becomes
is a whore

the barrel of your gun pressed hard
between her legs
and the way that you smile
at her pain

the way that being human is
all you can ever do

these failures
that add up to your life

the blue

cold in the sun and
blind in less obvious ways

the hours i waste
staring into the past with
bitter clarity

ten thousand poems defining
not myself
but everything around me

a list of reasons why the drowning boy
is better off dead

a pile of stones to throw through
the windows of houses i
never want to stand in again

and i believe that love reflected
becomes anger
and i believe that both are
impossible weights

i apologize to
everyone i've ever hurt
and i accept the fact that
apologies are meaningless

i offer you
the woman who loves pain
and the world she gives birth to
after she fucks the god
of starving dogs

what it looks like is
wherever you are

4 p.m.

raped every day for seven months
and no one believes you
because maybe you're overweight or
maybe unattractive

maybe your pain is irrelevant

and i've been told that poetry is
a shitty substitute for the truth and
i've been told that the holocaust
never happened

i've seen pictures of kim phuc
smiling like she'd never been set on fire

and what about the man who
took the picture?

did he help put the flames out?

does he understand the mind of god?

or maybe what i want to talk about
is this man who buys crack
at the edge of some country road while
his grandchildren watch from
the kitchen window

while his son fucks a
fourteen year old girl in a motel room
fifty miles away

and none of this is your fault
i know
and none of it's mine
and so we sleep the sleep of the just

we make noises that are
mistaken for prayer

they save no one
but they sound so fucking good

the drowning boy at 35

sorry in the shadows of a pure blue afternoon
and then maybe it's ten years later

maybe this idea of
the past devouring the future
without warning

this woman found naked raped and dead
on the railroad tracks
and the phone in my hand

the sound of it ringing on the other end

your voice like a stranger's
or your silence

the way these things matter
long after they no longer should

the way the killer laughs as he confesses

lights a cigarette and starts talking about
the other ones

says their names and then tells where he
left the bodies
and all that really matters anymore is
how much i miss you

all i've ever believed in was staying afloat

these people that i love
turning so easily into weights

marrow

consider
the logic of it

a junkie mother who sells her
child to a pedophile
because she needs money to score

do you see how
brutally simple it is?

do you see how easily
christ's throat is torn out?

listen

belief is a luxury

a starving dog is either something
you feed
or something you kick

we are all
someone else's god
in the end

poem for my sons, route 38 south, mid-july

and having no one
to forgive you your sins
you invent god

you build freeways and
shopping malls
and fill the trailer parks with
battered girlfriends

and there are days where
the sunlight is so pure that
all of this seems beautiful

there are moments that
mean too much
to set down on paper

the simple act
of closing my eyes and not
forgetting what i've seen

the knowledge that
none of this
needs to matter to
anyone besides myself

nothing to call it but
religion

burning, drowning

the way she says she
wants to fuck you
and that no one needs to know

the way she says she has a friend

says they have an idea

your smile
which is nothing anyone
could ever love

empty room

the wires like scars across
the face of the sky
and the sunlight caught in the trees

every window a blind eye

every hand
the memory of a fist

and what is it that makes you cry
here at the end of june?

how many times did you wish
your father dead
before it actually happened?

and what i remember is your story
about running 800 miles to
get away from a man who beat you
only to end up with someone
just like him

what i remember is the taste of
your sorrow

the stranger at the door who
said he wanted you back

the way that
every minute of every day
was wasted waiting
for the last word to be said

how beautiful you were
when it finally was

smaller acts of heresy in the pure white light of may

and so
if you're a dog
you fuck other dogs

if you're a junkie
you sell your children

you burn what you can
and you learnt o crawl
through the ashes

you drink the piss of god
and what it tastes like
is love

what it makes you
is holy

faith leaves
no room for doubt

golgotha

believe in poetry
or believe in war

believe in both
or in neither

curse god

fuck his corpse on
the slaughterhouse floor

understand that
without ugliness
there can be no beauty

understand that money
is more powerful
than words
and more obscene

lick the ass of
anyone you love more
than yourself

it gets easier
with practice

theological poem

tie the man's hands
behind his back

put the hood over his head
and tell him he's going to die

laugh when the piss
runs down his leg

you're a god now

the sea of cortez

the silence of where it is you are

the shadows of
ordinary objects and the way
they disappear

the way the clouds move
like cancer
across the face of the sun

and i am not
a believer in priests
but in the atrocities they commit

i am not a believer in churches
or in the dogs who burn them down

at some point you learn that
nothing is sacred

that nothing is so holy it cannot
be reduced to ashes

look at the aztecs

at the priests skinned alive
in rooms of gold

consider the women and children
butchered in their sleep
at sand creek
by a handful of drunken soldiers

remember that
all you can do is wait

the bleeding horse considers how to begin his autobiography

the way neither parent
will take the child

the way the trains run all day
and then all night

floorboards vibrating
and the trucks as they downshift
and the mother calling
for money

the father
nowhere to be found

his girlfriend
who says she's pregnant

says she wants to get clean
and then the guy she's fucking
who supplies her

the dogs who devour the bodies
they find by
the side of the road

these things we do
to stay alive

[Home](#)