

## Garage

AARON FAGAN was born in Rochester, New York, in 1973. Poems of his have appeared in *The American Poetry Review*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, *Boulevard*, *5AM*, *Living Forge*, *Salt*, *Shenandoah*, *Stand*, *TriQuarterly* and *The Yale Review*. He lives in the Bronx.



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AARON FAGAN



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<Dedication>



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*TriQuarterly*: “The Funeral Dinner”

*The Yale Review*: “With Someone Else’s Telephone”



Garage



*I locked my jaw with rusty nails  
and cured my tongue in lime  
but ate and drank in garbage pails  
and said these words of crime.*

—ALAN DUGAN

*Whichever word you speak—  
you owe to  
destruction.*

—PAUL CELAN



## Come and Get It

You could care less, I could care less. So  
We have something in common. Walk down  
This moderately metaphorical hall with me.

I want to show you something disgusting.  
(I feel like I already have, but fine, we will  
Have it your way.) How does a dead cat

Sound to you? A dead cat filled with maggots?  
And one eye that looks aware of your presence  
Despite the conventional impossibility of that?

Life should feel ridiculously full of hope again  
For no small unwarranted reason. Perhaps  
You should consider breaking a law today.

I'm just throwing that out there as a possibility.  
That hall was in a dungeon, in case you wondered.  
The apple, on the table, at the end, is for you.

## Private Number Calling

My cellular phone rang.  
A child was on the other  
End asking, "Who is it?"

(Is "on the other end"  
Even how you describe  
A cell connection?)

A digression, yes.  
But you see I kept saying,  
"Aaron, this is Aaron."

And the child (Too young  
To tell whether it was a boy  
Or a girl) repeated, "Who is it?"

Each time the voice calmer  
Than the last as my madness  
Grew up and out from nowhere.

The unknown child had already  
Mastered a tone of voice  
I remember from my childhood—

When the answer I gave  
To a question was not  
An answer the asker was after.

But bless the child, I wept  
In my hands, doubting  
My name and the setting sun.

Then Mara called through, asking,  
“Guess what?! Guess what?!”  
Milo, her runaway dog, had come home.

## With Someone Else's Telephone

Gathering information and groceries  
In the morning—before the full pitch  
Of afternoon and its distractions—  
Let's say I was—for the first time—  
Struck by my innate love for you.  
And each shopping day after that,  
I have experienced the full pitch  
Of my innate love for you, just  
Before noon, when you are gone.  
Gone—for practical purposes, just  
Shy of healthy—in the sense of  
Forever, once I get the headline—  
From the day after the last time  
I went shopping—out of my mind,  
About a person in the Safeway  
Parking lot who was arrested,  
Reciting lines from *Paradiso*,  
Naked, in Italian, and full pitch  
For the sun and other stars to hear  
The darkest light of love revealed.

## Drastic Measures

Each morning I set my lathe's counter to zero.  
For each part I make, I imagine a year. Moving  
Forward or backward from the birth of Christ,  
History helps pass the time. As I go, I do my best  
Not to think in the small increments that make  
These parts possible. I can't be *a hair off* as I slide  
Out into the years where man doesn't exist  
In either direction. It all goes back to tiny again.  
I was dead a thousand parts ago. It's lunchtime,  
And I can't remember if I had children with a woman  
I love. *There's no feeling more accurate than grief,*  
I scream, but the machine is loud and I don't know  
If I've said it. When the little ones came, which one  
Had hair approximately the same size and color as mine?

*Deus ex Machina*

I saw a boy today wearing  
A baby blue golf shirt with  
IMMACULATE CONCEPTION  
Embroidered on its breast.

I kept on walking with what  
I imagine the shirt feels like  
Running through my mind  
Like the machine that made it.

## Doing My Part for the Tool and Die Industry

On the floor you wouldn't have found us  
Lost in discussion over math's miracle  
Beautifully locked in precision parts. No.  
We put a living together on machines—  
And feeling as nameless as our parts to a  
Whole we'd never see did pass with time.  
On the hour we measured to maintain  
Micro-metric tolerances opposite those  
That, off in the corners of our particular  
Hells, we kept as high as ourselves and  
Hidden in the poisons we picked to get  
Through the day. Off by the sander in  
Tank-top and short-shorts, the boss's  
Model-hot daughter would saunter by—  
Showing off the fine line of her ass for all;  
And off the line, we traded fantasies,  
Drugs, and ways to fuck with her at a bar  
Where we cheated on everything the way  
We did at the shop, where we saw Bill  
With brain cancer fading in, dying out—  
And I began to run his part one day: on  
Lathe, punch-press, and broach I inhaled  
Exhaust, kept true to a scale, in part,  
And it doesn't spare me to say this.

## Grout

Rebuilding a family's master  
Shower I heard a mother tell  
Her boy, "Grandma doesn't  
Need a present this year  
Because she's dead, honey.  
And to that he gave a confused  
"O.K." echoing square, level,  
Plumb, and true to the small stall  
I was standing in, with grout on  
My trowel, filling in the gaps,  
Deep between the muttering tiles,  
Repeating *terrible, just terrible.*

## The Funeral Dinner

*It is enough to tell of the books we've read and our biography is done.*

— OSIP MANDELSTAM

On the title page of Rose Hecht's copy  
Of *A Child of the Century* you can see  
She kissed her husband's name beneath  
The inscription: *To Rose for whose heart  
And out of whose spirit this book was written  
By her grateful lover, Ben*

Rose, who after his death went through  
Each book in his vast library, documenting  
The mind of the man she loved in life,  
Taping in extra pages where his opinions  
Required more than simply highlighting  
"Benny's favorite line" in *A Hero of Our Time*.

In a dog-eared copy of *The Brothers K*  
She got to page one hundred and  
Stopped writing. You'd think reading too  
Unless you turn to the last page, some  
Five hundred later, where two words seem  
To be enough to follow the closing passage:

"Well, now we will finish talking  
And go to his funeral dinner.  
Don't be disturbed at our eating pancakes—  
It's a very old custom and there is something  
Nice in that!" *laughed Alyosha*. "Well,  
Let us go! And now we go hand in hand."

And it is as though she disappeared  
Into what her hand guided her to say,  
Right then, into the book itself,  
And became the words: *me too*.

## Residentialism

I was sitting in a field. It was a great field.  
One I was surely not the first to write about.  
The thought that so many thoughts had been  
Drafted in the company of its expanses  
Was putting me on the edge of its openness  
That had become so crowded with sentimentality.  
Ghost lines, of those who came before me,  
Took over as if they were in the wind, carrying  
Only the particularly bad ideas that had ever been  
Expressed there—right to the spot I was sitting  
Like a whispering pollen giving hay-fever to my  
Imagination—I couldn't breathe when they bound  
Together like troops repositioning for a final sweep:  
*Plush* was a musket at my temple, my eyes dilated  
In the face of the dark cannon barrel *green* and  
*Grass* was striking a deadly match.

## Monopoly, Toledo

*Trees are like people—it's not like you can just walk up to them  
and expect to get along.*

— JOSH LEOPOLD

I met Dave at Zebra Lounge in Chicago.  
His friend, Brian, was a ghost.  
He preferred the word *haunting*.

He asked me, "What's on your mind?"  
He wanted to know if I "feel like I have."  
I feel possessed to write *insignificance*.

Blank-faced with what's left of the future  
He said, "Genetically we have a clean slate."  
He said, "I want you to read something."

Leather notebook, a gratitude journal:  
*Write a story . . .* "What's on your mind?"  
"Do you mean right this second?" I asked.

"I am trying to finish my book of poems.  
They will make a movie out of it someday.  
A system will be developed to live in text.

We will stare out and place impressions."  
"Don't tell anyone you could make a million."  
He is doing a painting: Thoughts For A Dollar—

He has a patent number for each one to sell.  
He was upset I had heard this before.  
"See . . . fucker's are already ripping me off!"

I could have mistaken what he meant.  
One is rich with insights about masturbation,  
But women drag the men by their hair in this one.

I said, "I feel like we're being watched."  
Downtown a building was *The Fountainhead*.  
I am listening to *Waking and Discovering*.

*Write a story . . .* "What's on your mind?"  
"Do you mean right this second?" I asked.  
"This whole conversation should be a movie."

Brian makes art. Dave likes art. Dave buys art.  
Brian could tell I hadn't really read Rilke's *Letters*.  
It is with some trepidation that I move forward.

Brian being Brian, questions the theory of light.  
Genetically we have a clean slate.  
He said, "I want you to read something."

Leather notebook, a gratitude journal:  
Every drink's a dollar. Your ninth beer's free.  
I was looking at the nicotine . . .

Stained photos of the owner . . .  
Playing piano in a wig.  
James put his hand on me.

Is \$75 enough to leave my wife?  
Would Greece help if Canada  
Went to war with Mexico?

My beer was empty  
And I had nothing to say.  
Who knows what to say?

He told us to “Go home and study”  
Because our shoes were “all wrong!”  
The barmaid yelled at James.

James Joyce got up and shook.  
He made his way to the door.  
All the signs of his life were there.

Benét says Jasper Johns’ work  
“Is his attempts at viewing  
Familiar objects with a fresh vision.”

Benét says James Joyce’s work  
“Was known for its revolutionary  
Innovations in the art of the novel.”

His books were “denounced as obscure,  
Unintelligible, nonsensical, and obscene.”  
This is the comodification of grief.

*I will try to express myself in some mode  
Of life or art as freely as I can, using for my  
Defense the only arms I allow myself to use*

—*Silence, exile, and cunning . . .*  
*I will not serve that in which*  
*I no longer believe. Living is*

Teaching languages and doing clerical work.  
“I am trying to finish my book of poems.”  
*Insignificance* is on my mind again.

*Write a story . . . 3* gratitudes for what  
Makes sense of our past, brings peace  
For today, and creates vision for tomorrow.

I said, “I feel like we’re being watched.”  
“They will make a movie out of it someday.”  
“Don’t tell anyone you could make a million.”

“This whole conversation should be a movie.”  
He said, “I want you to read something.”  
I feel possessed to write *insignificance*—

If, genetically, we have a clean slate  
Then let Love design us a wonderful  
New blueprint for the future.

Brian is doing a painting: Thoughts For A Dollar.  
He has a patent number for each one to sell.  
He said, “I want you to read something.”

His books were “denounced as obscure,  
Unintelligible, nonsensical, and obscene.”  
Painting “familiar objects with a fresh vision.”

Brian said, “Don’t laugh Toledo  
Is an amazing place.” Downtown  
A building was *The Fountainhead*.

—*Silence, exile, and cunning . . .*

An architect of enormous conceit

Must justify his faith in the permanent

Values of honest design in four senses:

1) historical or literal 2) allegorical

3) moral 4) anagogical.

James Joyce still stares out of his impression—

*As the bleak incense surges, cloud on cloud,*

*Voidward from the adoring waste of souls.*

## Like It Is

*Take: this is my body.*

MARK 14:22

Life unfolds sideways like a sentence.  
Life unfolds sideways like a sentence.  
Our love is constantly changing.  
Our love is constantly changing.  
Is a life-sentence constantly sideways  
Like love unfolds our changing?

Better yet, pass the bread, my dear.  
Better yet, pass the bread, my dear.  
It is late and you never look too tired.  
It is late and you never look too tired.  
The late bread. It is tired too, dear, yet  
You pass . . . and, my, never look better.

What is another word for paradelle,  
What is another word for paradelle,  
When it sounds like a lesser parade?  
When it sounds like a lesser parade?  
Parade another paradelle for when it  
Sounds like what a word *lesser* is!

A paradelle constantly unfolds  
A lesser changing: Life.  
You parade the password sideways.  
What sentence too sounds better late  
Like our bread is when it is tired and, yet,  
Like it is . . . never look for another love, my dear.

## Looney Tunes

In this one  
A crow is busy  
Being a crow

Eating ears of corn  
Like a typewriter  
Before deadline.

The farmer,  
Outraged,  
Rounds his shotgun

While wild chases  
Ensnare.  
Radical plans

Backfire  
Like his gun  
With the crow's finger

In the barrel.  
The crow toys  
With the old man

All day long  
Leaving him lost  
In the maze of his corn.

In the distance  
Perhaps he, too, can see  
As the sun fades

It's turned into a speaker?  
And hear  
(Despite his madness)

A stuttering pig  
Smash through  
In the end

And announce  
That *th-that's all* there is?

## Oceanic

I prefer writing poems from the ocean floor.  
Don't know the name of anything around me.  
Never would've occurred to me up there.  
All I hear is air escaping me to the surface.  
Makes me think this is the place for poetry.

I, in the way water pressure reassures, see  
My poems were about "me" needing a hug.  
Note to self: Saltwater amplified the pain,  
But cleansed the wound. No need for poem  
To commemorate how inarticulate we are.

So I feel perfectly happy leaving in a line like—  
*What will my dog do to regain my attention?*  
It's a lifeline reminding me like my beeping tank  
I must rise to the surface as to a morning alarm.  
And, of course, the dog—licking away the tears.