

THE LYDIAN GALE PARR

An incantation

by Karinne Keithley Syers

karinnekeithley@gmail.com

THIS WORK IS IN PROGRESS

SETTING:

To be performed as an oratorio in some kind of ornate interior chamber, perhaps an embroidered tent.

The event could also be thought of as a kind of Homeric TV opera.

Possibly the layers of the event – the speech, the dancing, the images – are separated out in time, so that the live event is dedicated to listening, followed by photographic documentation received given after the performance, perhaps even sent in the mail, of the dances, and the images invoked.

PERFORMERS:

PART ONE: Two speakers

PART TWO: All (dancing)

PART THREE: The Lydian Gale Parr

PART FOUR: *present*: a guide, the letter speakers as micro-chorus;

recorded: a narrator, a correspondent

PART FIVE: All as The Lydian Gale Parr

CODA: All, led by micro-chorus

PART ONE: LETTER

(The American)

Performed by a pair of emissaries, speaking in almost-unison. Readings of the letter might be performed with a minute choreography of rib cage mobility, breath, chest collapse and expanse, recollection of *épaulement* (codified options for shoulder placement in ballet) or other classical or invented techniques of posture, lean, glance aversion, blinking, and actions of the lips that don't involve speech.

A double slash (/ /) in the middle of the line indicates two simultaneous lines to be spoken slightly differently by each of the speakers, according to whether they are standing on the right or left. Where the double slash is broken between the end of one line and the beginning of the next, those two lines are spoken simultaneously.

One

I came out of a high-walled city.

I saw the walls from the outside.

I was in the air, turning away.

I have done nothing.

I have done nothing to the cooing of pigeons.

I will give with an unsparing hand.

I dreamt there was another lobe of this city. The buildings were tall and made of stone.

I dreamt but I was only waiting.

I don't command.

I wrote a letter of pure friendship.

I was a long time looking.

I was speaking in terms even more ecstatic than those.

I don't pretend you could hear nothing. No, I don't pretend it.

I speak in terms even more dramatic than those.
To give you warning.
“One should be glad to think of nothing!” said L. to me.

I am curious about this slender tree.
I will move at my ease through these agreeable stations.
I permit you to doubt it.
I give a clear account of nothing.
I knew a high-walled city not otherwise remembered.
I knew but had not been inside.
I spoke and manifested freely. // I spoke freely like a ghost.

Lead me out of the room.
Sit down in the silence. // Lie down in the silence.
Offer yourself for sale.

I can't see anything in it.
I turned away because I could not justify myself.
I remember myself then.
I remember myself, looking up.
Look up again.
Looking up again.
Might be looking up now. // Might be lying down now.

I have said nothing.
I have said nothing to the anger of dogs or the frailty of windows. /
 / I have said nothing to the grafting of plants or the startling of birds.
I have said nothing to the grafting of plants or the startling of birds. /
 / I have said nothing to the anger of dogs or the frailty of windows.
I have said nothing to your radio or to your computer.

I said ancient things.

I said these are ancient things.

I said I am Gale Parr.

My name is Lydian Leslie Parr.

I come from a high-walled city I cannot remember.

You must make it be quiet.

I need to sleep but cannot.

Might be sleeping now. // Might be fading now.

I have done nothing but remain near at hand.

I have done nothing but cook my dinners next to it.

I have done nothing but find out how to drive home.

I was curious about the slender tree.

I was moving at my ease through the spacious gallery.

I held or said something.

Take it out of the room.

Go on, take it out of the room.

I took it out of the room because I could not justify it.

It spoke in terms even more salacious than those.

It was a letter of pure disgust. // It was a letter of pure inquiry.

Two

I want to see from the high casement the world you propose.

I want to see its spectacular violence.

Its oracular violence.

From a high perch in a slender tree of the last century.

I will know when this freedom has been too intense.

I will know better how to plausibly fail.

That easy feeling about life —

Don't answer me now.

I accept you.

I accept you on any terms.

Lead me out of the room.

Walk me to that slender tree.

Put your face to the ground and be graceful. // Put your face to your hand and be grateful.

I spoke easily about it.

How I entered the house by a mysterious process.

By an unspecified process.

How I don't know what it is.

How I cannot remember the walls.

I will not recall the terms. // I will not refuse the terms.

I don't take his manner of life. // I don't take his ideas about life.

I know the opening in the mountainous surround.

A mirror covers it over, an invention of the moment.

I cannot possibly find it. // I cannot possibly claim it.

I cannot possibly cover it. // I cannot possibly repeat it.

Not vicious or malicious.

Not noble or majestic.

"We launched our hero upon the current."

"We found a vast region."

I accepted it on any terms.

Sit down and be watchful. // Sit down and recover yourself.

Descend by an unspecified process, says the Lydian Gale Parr.

To a surface unspecified.

A chair you cannot see.

Cannot possibly see. // Cannot possibly reach.

There are bells ringing now.

They ring with unsparing hands.

They have done nothing to my unsparing hand.

My hand unsparing.

Something bends.

A feeling bends over there. // A feeling bends under me.

At the ceiling, // Like a ghost,

on the roof beyond the ceiling. // under the roof just like a ghost.

Packed away like casement windows. // Bends above, with you below.

Open me outward.

Let me look at the world you envision.

I cannot possibly know it. // I cannot possibly recover.

Three

She studied drawing.

When he was dull, she studied drawing, looked across the river, felt savage.

She succeeded. He remained.

He remained without human ingredients.

I am perfectly free, I said, very dully. // I am perfectly free, I said, very bravely.

I am left perfectly free to go in quest of one simple, practical impulse to hang in vaguely lustrous folds about her body.

It folded about her.

I don't know what they have done.

Pleased by your swiftness.

Pleased by your taking command of it.

Pleased by the dismal iterations of mysterious brilliancy in this valley thick-planted with grey trees.

I am not to see around it.

Might be swiftly selling it now.

Might have traded you for something lustrous.

Stop at the mark.

Tell what lies beyond that slender tree.

Seen through a rough aperture in the wall.

In a low-descending wall.

Now gone to ruin.

Now finished for the night. // Now finished for the likes of us.

Now drained away.

Now laying beneath my recognition. // Now finished for the likes of us.

Now pretending to do without radiance.

Without the usual level of radiance.

Swiftly passing its single angle.

Its solitary advantage. // Its magnificent advances.

The message does not reach you. // The message advances.

I carried the letter but I lost it. // I carried the letter but destroyed it.

I reached you without the message.

I have gone well beyond it. // I have gone out like a ghost.

Gone well beyond that place.

Then, abruptly, I saw nothing. // Then, abruptly, I saw something.

Then, abruptly, I was finished for the night.

To crawl across that hollow place.

On my knees. // Scrape my face.

Scrape my forehead. // On hands or knees.

I crawled out of a high walled city I refuse to remember.

I came holding a letter, which I lost.

It was a letter of pure inquiry. // It was a letter of pure denial.

Four

Give me your money.

Warn me back from your deliberate excitement.

Allow me to profit from your occasion.

I don't know why.

I cannot escape.

I lost my travel clothes.

I offered them for sale.

We are old companions in arms, said the man who bought them.

That is of no use, said the old woman he addressed.

Everything is done in the presence of some evil.

Some darkened will.

Ask.

I have deprived you of many scenes of lively disgust.

I delighted in them intensely before the glass went opaque in the dust.

It is a transaction of the interior. I don't know why.

It is unclear. // It is unjust.

I invoke a line of all speculation.

What all I saw will be of no use.

I have all kinds of plans.

I have transferred all the items.

I have stood before all the scenes.

I have seen all the lights go out.

What I saw will be of no use.

I want to play a part. // I want to behold it.

I want its forms and ceremonies. // I want to behold it.

I want you to pass noiselessly through me. // I want to behold it.

To move effortlessly past me. // I want to behold it.

Through my oracular violence. // To feel its oracular violence.

Go.

Go on, now.

Going on now.

Might have gone all the way over. // Might have gone all the way out.

Might have gone all the way over. // Might have gone all the way out.

Might feel a lightening in the head. // Might feel a tightening in the stomach.

Might feel a lightening in the head. // Might feel a tightening in the stomach.

Might feel a prickling in the skin. // Might feel a numbing through the blood.

Might feel a prickling in the skin. // Might feel a numbing through the blood.

Might not find your way. // Might not remember the shape.

Might not know how to leave. // Might not know to mark it.

That easy feeling about life.

That warning it was coming.

That warning you had nothing to do with it.

That wavering feeling. // That idiotic feeling.

That hollowing feeling. // That blundering feeling.

These are ancient things.

I said: these are ancient things.

I said my name is Gale Parr.

I said I am the Lydian Gale Parr.

Now arrived on this scene. // Now asking you to leave.

Now arrived on this scene. // Now asking you to leave.

To disband. // To unhand it.

To disembark. // To disband it.

To dissolve your understanding.

To disperse its fruits.

To let them waste.

I can't know why.

Five

(song)

A third person joins the two speakers of the letter and initiates a song. The only word in the song is “hollow,” but it is sung at such strange length and draped over such irregular figures that it begins to sound, occasionally, like the word, “allow.”

PART TWO: TAR SPAR

A long dance displaces the feeling of the letter entirely. It is serene but venomous. The dancers imagine Mont St Michel growing out of their hair, dragging them slightly skyward. But the Mont St. Michel is a model made of ash, the way the pressed ashes of monks are made into little prayer bricks. The choreography should be sourced from the protocols of the renaissance Anti-Masque.

If this dance is withheld from the live performance (see note at beginning of the play) and only “performed” in photographic documentation, the stage direction above should be either read aloud or be projected, and the music of the dance should play out, but with no visible action.

PART THREE: NARRATIVE OF THE LYDIAN GALE PARR

Something unrolls, and the lights dim. Some kind of scenery is indicated. This scenery gestures toward the panoramic, and also to prolonged exhaustion, to having come to a kind of end. THE LYDIAN GALE PARR enters, perhaps played by a performer in ornate drag. Certainly she is ornate.

She looks directly into a bright light, directed into her face. The light is moved to a position behind someone present in the audience. Gale Parr takes that person's hand for a moment. Looks at that person with incredible compassion.

LYDIAN:

I was born into a city surrounded by high walls.
When I was young, my city came under siege.

Who sent this wild, raging bull into our country?

Men and boys go out of our city carrying guns and lay down on the soil. When they don't return, I am sent out, to carry a letter.

I carried it very far, but eventually I lost it.
Eventually I returned, but was sent out again.

A musical, tonal shift in the environment

I went out through a hidden passage in the high wall. When you walk beside that wall, even if you resist, even if you do not look, it will fill all your consciousness, as if the wall is trying to recall itself to you. The wall appears to descend from above. This is a well-known illusion but every year, it astonishes us. In fact, the wall was dug, not built. The wall lay below the ground and the valley was

dug to reveal it. If when you come alongside, it appears to you to hover, that means you have already been a body buried without ceremony or protection in this open place. That is the origin of my city. I can't know how or why.

A hand draws purely, slowly, freely across a high city wall. A free hand moves without notice across a small jointed place. We are old companions in arms, so I take you to my city. I draw a white glove over your hand and draw your white hand across the wall until we find that aperture, remove its covering, and enter into its expanse, and the emptiness goes on gleaming.

A single opalescent hand lies in the center of the waste, sprouting out of the ground, holding a letter. Somewhere, a waterfall in the shape of a horseshoe pulls itself shut as I take the letter in my own hand and close my eyes. I see my teacher in a wood house beyond the crest of a hill. I see a dog with no teeth guarding a house with no windows. I see barracks covered over by dune grass. I see them sinking. I open my eyes and read the letter. The letter instructs me to begin again. They always do. I leave you and the city.

A musical, tonal shift in the environment, like a key change.

Beyond the wall, an unusual level of radiance burns my skin. The sand throws light in my eye. No living thing remains to stink in all this radiant heat. *I won't be missed if I lay down right here.* I say this to myself, alone in a vast and radiant plain beyond the wall. Who remains to miss me, a dark eye sent forth by a dead hand?

I have fallen from a great height, and it makes me feel savage. You, with your senselessness and violence, how could you know?

Restart, my dear friend, I say to my dear self as I touch my dear body, and I find my way across the radiating plain, holding myself fast with an unsparing hand to some darkened will.

I move at my ease, now. I need to sleep but cannot. I am holding the letter. I have been dressed — by whom? — in the costume of a messenger — how? — and I ascend the ridge, as I did in my youth. “I am curious about that slender tree.” I say, as I did in my youth. I give this passphrase to the air because the ridge is evacuated.

The air does not respond.

“I AM CURIOUS ABOUT THAT SLENDER TREE,” I yell.

The other performers, who are watching, all softly say:

Better.

Then The Lydian continues her narrative.

The air cools, and I make for the solitary tree of the last century, in safety, in silence, in costume.

When I was young, in my city, there were buildings made of stone and like the other children, it was my job to embellish them with bright things. There were houses whose walls were gardens, and walled gardens whose walls themselves were gardens. There were holes in the walls, and those holes were lined with still other gardens.

But I refuse to describe them to you.

Cover your face and put your mouth to the ground and be silent.

The Lydian's speech transitions toward song, in the style of recitativo.

I tell you I will not describe the interior. Still you listen?

I tell you I will do no soothing. Still you listen.

I tell you to make no noise and you sit in silence.

I ask you to accept me on any terms and you do.

I tell you, *I am a feeling machine, just a machine for making feeling.*

My name is Gale Parr. I am the Lydian Gale Parr.

I come from a high walled city now gone to waste.

So many hours spent away from it, walking.

So many hours spent returning.

I am here on the high ridge above the valley.

I am here in this tent of my own invention, a thing who listens.

I carried the message but could not read it.

I carried the message but lost it before I learned to read.

I carried the message but delivered it to the wrong hand.

I carried the message but I destroyed it.

I found the living moved away from me.

I found the dead became invisible to me.

I could not find a way of dying so I went on living.

I could not find a way of living so I chose to return home.

I could not find my target so I did not shoot.

I could not find my reverence for the errand so I did not fulfill it.

I could not find my traveling clothes so I did not travel.

When I wore the costume of a messenger, of a sweet boy setting out

on his errand: a blue of a bell a boy. O sweet boy, come on over,
sings the air to the messenger. *Come on up to this high ridge. Come on up
to this high ridge.* The distance stops gleaming. The city goes missing.

A riddle. Sung differently, or spoken.

I lose no direction because I am all lost.
I am without all the old facings.
I say all the ancient things but observe no protections.
I crumble the moment I meet the air.
What am I?

And then one day I found I had returned to this emptied place.
And I found it still hidden by its saving invention. *Ever since I left you,*
I say to the city, *you are safe.*

*A dance is performed in a wheel pattern, with the Lydian Gale Parr at its center. This goes on for exactly four
minutes, then arrests in a tableau framing the Lydian Gale Parr as if she embodies the allegorical figure of Virtues.
From the center of the figure, she speaks about herself in the third person:*

I want to be old, she said to me once. By which she meant, I want
to be done with my errand. But I can see nothing, I told her. I can
see nothing.

*THE LYDIAN GALE PARR convulses lightly and beautifully at the center of the wheel. It is her signature. The
other dancers begin moving now in a dance of almost-sameness, a quivering moving image. This sameness dance
goes on for a while. Then everything is taken away. Very noisy a/v junk invades the environment.*

PART FOUR: REPORTS

(Underworld)

The assembled audience is taken down a staircase into a dark cabinet or chamber, or else the present space is transformed a way that conjures the sense of descent. Although it is insufficiently lit to discern this, the walls are densely covered in images. A few televisions are scattered around the space, and occasionally transmit the CORRESPONDENT's field dispatches. The NARRATOR's voice is disembodied and new to us, transmitted through some kind of intercom. The audience is led by the GUIDE, assisted by the MICRO-CHORUS (the now singing speakers of the letter in Part One), who sing continuously underneath the entire section, sometimes wordlessly.

MICRO-CHORUS sings these three words, using gestures to help communicate sense of the homonyms:

hour/our/are

GUIDE:

The painting shows the wide arena of an ancient city, probably the remnant of an open air market. Smoke or perhaps clouds billow in the distance. In the middle of the image, a hand sprouts out of the ground, holding a letter.

On the television, a reporter is reporting from a hurricane, while simultaneously showing the site of some unnamed atrocity to the viewer. Perhaps a kind of spare yodel of the micro-chorus counterpoints the scene. The Correspondent is a native of somewhere real or fictional in the Anglophone world that is neither America nor England.

CORRESPONDENT:

Even after hours of fruitless observation, the silence led me to believe the mystery of the missing child.

During the ascent, I tried to forget what I had seen. When I emerged, the men averted their gaze.

The utopian meadow of my memory was a scatter of small items stretching across everyone's idea of heaven. Its upper heights are bleak. Its peaks are frequently covered with hail.

Rather than pursue, I had gone walking in the vast saddle terrain where the beast had wandered. I found my body difficult to control.

The meadows were filled with vestiges of tree nests. There was an area containing circles, the sulfurous and somewhat satanic-appearing craters.

For several years after that I forfeited countless observations. Pretending I had nothing to do with the census, I stopped, and feigned feeding on thistle leaves.

MICRO-CHORUS (speaking):

Ever since I left you, you are safe.

NARRATOR:

A boat crosses a sea at night. An invisible voice tells the captain to call out across the water that the great god Pan has died. *The great god Pan is dead*, he calls into the darkness. Mourning cries carry across the water from some invisible shore and the wind comes up.

GUIDE (singing in the mode of *recitativo*)

Images are painted directly onto the walls,

and cover the house. Earlier, pre-existing murals are appropriated in disproportionate ways. She leans against a rock or floats over a field. Grotesque figures loom, unsettlingly out of proportion with the landscape. Mountains cradle the oversized elbow of an unidentified girl. The forms sometimes stop and merge. Sometimes without transition they become violent, perverse, or superstitious. One image shows a naked man dismembering and eating his infant son. (A local story.) In the grand, central hall is an image of a fugitive figure carrying a letter. A goat, characteristically assumed to be male, stands with its back to us facing an ugly convocation. A slender tree obscures a scene too gruesome to report. We have chosen not to show the images.

We are greeted by speculation or the record of speculation. The name of the artist becomes a ventriloquism, a liberating identification.

I step now, softly, down these stairs. As if I am playing a piano, as in the local custom. Stepping down this scale with its sharp, unnatural fourth. Obviously, I am speaking of the Lydian mode.

Bartok's short piano piece "In Lydian Mode" (or another, new composition in the Lydian mode) is played and the GUIDE and MICRO-CHORUS do a muted, gestural dance while the televisions play footage showing Leningrad under the siege. The playing of the music should be a physical event: put on a record, a tape, or play it on a keyboard.

NARRATOR:

A boat crosses a sea at night. What good will that do?

"In Lydian Mode" is played again. The siege footage plays again but this time the GUIDE and MICRO-CHORUS are completely still.

GUIDE:

Some days, you visualize an ancient city.
 Other times you prefer to think of a colony in space.
 An endless sentence, stretching from one to the other.
 Evidence of an eternal place in our bodies which delights in blood.
 You do not watch the images.
 What good would that do?

NARRATOR:

A boat capsizes on a sea at night.

GUIDE:

We have chosen not to show you the images.

CORRESPONDENT (*in wind and on television, as before*):

Even in the latest hours of the city's plundering, I found I was capable of silence.

During the ascent, I tried to forget what I had seen. When I emerged, the men averted their gaze.

The utopian meadow of my memory was a scatter of broken objects strewn across the idea of real darkness.

Rather than pursue, we went walking in the valley beyond the old wall of my city. I found it was difficult to remain composed. The meadows were filled with the vestiges of old houses. There was an area containing circles, the sulfurous and somewhat satanic-appearing craters of abandoned wells.

For several years after that I forfeited my right to vote. Pretending I had nothing to do with the census, I stopped working, and feigned

mental collapse.

GUIDE (*holding the hand of someone in the audience*):

Ever since I left you, you are safe.

GUIDE reveals a large hyper-realistic painting as the MICRO-CHORUS continues to sing. In the image, a family convenes in a spacious gallery to sit for a photograph. The scene is of the early 21st century. In the bottom right corner, almost out of the frame, a photographer's apparatus is shown. The photographer is unseen except for a skeletal hand resting on the camera, index finger extended ambiguously both reaching toward the shutter and pointing at the scene. At the center of the group, a mother cradles a child who bears the artist's face, and whose gaze is transfixed by the ceiling's ornate chandelier.

MICRO-CHORUS:

hover / over

over / hover

over / spoiler

GUIDE shows another image. In the foreground, the wreckage of a house, partially grown over by grass and weeds. A power plant's three smokestacks dominate the background. Visible where they once would have been obscured by a wall, their smoke uncannily aligns with the remnant structure, as if billowing in the immediate aftermath of the bomb.

MICRO CHORUS:

grass / glass

REPORTER shows a serially photographed image of a skull cradled by a hand in slightly different positions.

NARRATOR:

Ornament, firmament, continues. Into endless matter, dark or illuminated. Expands, rescinds, goes on.

GUIDE sings, underscored by humming *MICRO-CHORUS*, who place their hands on the occipital ridge of each other's skulls and walk in a continuously moving knot or Möbius.

My fine grass home, come on over

My fine grass home, come on over

Go aground, go in search of me

Go aground, speak no more of me

My fine grass home, come on over

My fine grass home, come on over

Go aground, go in search of me

Go aground, speak no more of me

My fine grass home, come on over

My fine grass home, come on over

MICRO-CHORUS (*lying on the ground, speaking over the GUIDE's refrain*):

// If you dream of another lobe of the city where you are marooned and it is filled with dogs, you will experience misfortune.

GUIDE:

// *Come over*

LETTER SPEAKERS:

// Unless the dogs are sleeping, which means you will give birth.

REPORTER:

// *Come over*

LETTER SPEAKERS:

// If you dream of another lobe of the city you are marooned in
and its buildings are tall and made of stone, you must divest
yourself of what you know best.

REPORTER:

// Come over

LETTER SPEAKERS:

// If you dream of another lobe of the city you are marooned in
and its inhabitants have been slaughtered,
it means you are blessed.

Without transition, all three (as micro-chorus) sing a micro song that should feel starkly different (different key, tempo, mode) than the song that just ended. The song has only two words and lasts for only twenty seconds:

salary / airily

NARRATOR:

Micro-Chorus sings a micro song.

MICRO-CHORUS (*again, one step up*):

salary / airily

NARRATOR:

Micro-Chorus sings a micro song.

MICRO-CHORUS:

airily / charity

They suspend the last note through:

CORRESPONDENT:

A boy yells through the wind to his mother, who is sick. It's windy, he yells but she does not wake up. It's w-w-w—w—-w-WINDY, he says, in an anachronistic time signature that attacks the lady who knows who she is, attacks and undoes her. This, like all other facts, is welcome.

Sound breaks off.

A television silently plays a long video of smoke billowing from a smokestack.

GUIDE (*Beatifically, accompanying herself with classical gesticulations*):

If you overhear a conversation and cannot understand it, you will discover a hidden innocence. If you overhear a conversation and wish you could join it, you will discover a hidden need. If the place where you hear this conversation is filled with dogs, you will succumb to a hidden delusion. But if the dogs are sleeping, it means you are safe.

SONG (sung by Guide and Micro-Chorus; this time with an aggressive layer of percussive rhythm)

hollow / allow

PART FIVE: NARRATIVE OF THE LYDIAN GALE PARR

(Chorus)

The space is again transformed or the audience is led beyond it, to a bridge in space. All performers are now THE LYDIAN GALE PARR, which should be made clear by their wearing her costume distributed between them. The narration, and the role of the Lydian, is traded off. Or more, this section of narration is spoken as if the Lydian's story is a common fund. Possibly this is sung instead of spoken, in a mode that lapses between recitative and song. If so, it might begin feeling like choral speech, and continue into song, and return to speech, in slow, vague transition.

I went out of the city through a rough aperture in a high wall, holding a letter.

I crossed the plain surrounding the city, filled by men laying siege.

I carried our standard, as an emblem of safe passage.

I went in search of the general who commanded the siege.

I was to find the general, to give him this letter.

When I reached his tent on the high ridge, I found he had gone.

When I asked if I could wait for him, I was told he might not return.

I was told he had been summoned to another, more important conflict.

I went along the ridge in the direction he had travelled.

I carried the letter in my hand.

I followed in the general's path.

I passed cities under siege but did not find him laying it.

I passed battles underway but could not find him waging it.

I passed a famine underway but did not find him suffering it.

I passed a harvest underway but did not find him reaping it.

I was taken captive but then released.

I was arrested but then escaped.

I lied and I was punished.

I told a half truth and was set free.

I offered myself for sale.

Might have traded myself for something lustrous.

Might have cast a more-than-usual level of radiance.

I followed the news of the general whenever I heard it.

I followed and followed it.

I followed the news even when it was disgusting.

I followed the news even when it was incredible.

I followed the news even when it was intolerable.

I followed news of the general even when it sickened me.

I followed news of the general even when it enraged me.

I followed news of the general beyond the compass of my region.

I followed news of the general beyond the limits of my pages.

I followed news of the general beyond the edges of my narrative.

I refused to stop.

I refused my forms and ceremonies.

I felt contempt for my errand but still wanted to behold it.

I felt pity for my letter but still wanted to understand it.

I felt adoration for my body but still wanted to deliver it.

It led me onwards until I reached a sea.

It led me up the coast until I found a city.

I found a train and hid in it.

I found a bus and hijacked it.

I found a ship and paid to board it.

I held the emblem of safe passage in one hand and the letter in the other.

I was taken to a city of drills and rigs but could not find the general there.

The power went out and the lights went off so I did not stay.

I was taken to an island parched and crowded but could not find the general there.

I was taken to a port city.

It was a city I had dreamed of.

A virus was ravaging it so I did not enter.

I stood outside its walls, turning away.

I was told the general was dying there.
I was told the people were dying there.
I felt no compassion for the general so I did not cry.
I felt no pity for these strangers so I skulked away.
I hid on a container ship.
The ship left the port.
The port gave way to flat, grey water.
I looked around my hiding place.
I found others hiding.
I found junk to be sold.
I found trash to burnt in other, poorer places.

But we had air breathe.
We had water to drink.
We had our solidarity.
We had our hands.
With unsparing hands, each held the other.
Holding, we waited.
Waiting, we crossed the water to a new port city.

[INSERT MIGRANCY]

[I went very far, but eventually I left them.]
I left.
I took a car.
I took a plane.
I looked for sprawling places.
I climbed hills in search of armies but found only streams of lighted roads and houses.
I climbed trees in search of hiding holes but saw only plastic bags waving from branches.

I found a massive city and within that city another city perched in its rooftop and climbed to that rooftop but found only a clutter of antennae.

I made a shelter from the wires.

I built a radio and listened.

I built a television and watched.

I saw news of a bankrupt city but the general was not in it.

I saw news of a rioting city but knew the general would not believe it.

I saw news of a flooded city but no one spoke the general's name.

I saw a show about cities under siege, but it did not mention my own.

I saw a show about ancient city walls, but heard no mention of my own.

I lay down within the thicket of antennae.

I lay down in the silence.

I lay down but felt no weight.

I offered myself for sale, but drew no price.

Then I opened the letter.

—and I drew my white fingers slowly, purely, freely across it,

—and left it flying from an antenna and climbed down away from there.

I see it now, tethered to an antenna:

The flag of my country.

Put my skull to the ground, cover my face.

Do you see me lying down now?

Can you see that I am lying down?

I am lying down now.

I dream I am marooned in another lobe of this city, still holding the letter.

The buildings are tall and made of stone.
Behind all the doors are folded sleeping cats.
In all the windows are sleeping cats.
On all the doormats are sleeping cats.
I touch one through the window.
It moves as if I am touching it though I am not.
I imagine I can touch it.
It moves as if it can feel my hand.
Is it my hand mind or my finger mind that can touch it?
I dream I am looking up again.
Looking up at casement windows that open out.
A face shows but when I climb up to meet it I find no one there.

Let me see you.
Let me look at the world you envision.
Let me see your spectacular violence.

I dream an ancient, high-walled city under excavation by archeologists.
Its streets are a scatter of everyone's idea of artifact.
Its shape is a composite of everyone's idea of origin.
It smells like sweat.
I know it is the general's city and so I join the digging.
A face shows in a fragment of bowl, but it is not his.
A face shows in a mosaic floor, but it is not his.
A face shows in the lay of pipes, but it is not his.
I turn my hand to my face.
I turn from woman to man.
I turn from man to soldier.
I turn from soldier to civilian.
I turn from civilian to consoler.
I turn from consoler to violator.

I turn from violator to failure.
I turn from failure to apology.
I turn from apology to sneer.
I turn from one who sneers to one who laughs.
I turn from one who laughs to one who hesitates.
I turn from one who hesitates to one who waits.
I wait.
I feel a dissipation.
I feel the loss of my errand, of my focus.
I feel the loss of my attention.
I am inattentive.
I am in division.
I am in solution.
I am in confusion.
I become a cloud.
I turn from water to cloud.
I am a cloud.
I gather like a cloud, now.
I turn over as a cloud now, hanging and gathering.
I turn in vaguely lustrous folds around your window.
I hang in vaguely lustrous folds around your book, around your body.
I hang low, obscuring your television and your computer.
I obscure your energy.
I hang close to the walls that enclose you.
I hang close to the door by which you entered.
Then without transition, I go out from the frame of your vision.

Going diachronically away from you now.
Going before and behind you.
I can't know how.
I can't know why.

For I do not hope to know you.
 For I cannot choose you for this story.
 For I cannot claim you for this ending.
 For I don't know where you are facing.
 Or what you are seeing.
 I can't know what you are feeling.
 Or if you are resting.
 Or if you are looking.
 Or if you are inviting.
 Or if you have been calling for me.

CODA

A song is sung by the micro chorus. They continue to perform the "wait, wait" refrain when the Guide begins speaking. The other performers contribute to a choreographic room, or to a layer of rhythmic underscore of snapping, clapping, or clicking. Everyone faintly recapitulates the dance of almost-sameness, this time more expansively and elegantly.

I was in the air, turning away

I was in the air, turning away

Turning away, turning away

I was in the air, turning away

Turning away, turning away

I identify my unsparing hand,

turning away, turning away

I will enterprise with my unsparing hand

turning away, turning away

I want to play a part. // I want to behold it.

I want my forms and ceremonies. // I want to behold it.

I want to behold it. // I want to lay down under it.

I want to behold it. // I want to lay down under it.

Wait, wait

GUIDE:

// I want to be old, she said to me once.

Wait, wait

GUIDE:

// By which she meant, I want to be done with my errand.

Wait, wait

GUIDE:

// But I can see nothing, I told her.

Wait, wait

GUIDE:

// I can see nothing.

Wait, wait.

GUIDE:

// If you dream of another lobe of the city in which you are marooned, and its lights obscure the firmament, it means you are homeless.

Wait, wait.

GUIDE:

// If you dream of another lobe of the city in which you are marooned and its residents turn to each other with love, it means

you are pregnant.

Wait, wait.

GUIDE:

// If you dream of another lobe of the city in which you are marooned, and it is empty, it means you have started again.

Wait, wait.

THE LYDIAN GALE PARR (*a riddle*):

I lose no direction because I am all lost.

I am without all the old facings.

I say all the ancient things but observe no protections.

I crumble the moment I meet the air.

What am I?

Guide summons some kind of energy. A/V sound junk fills the room. Super junk environment increases itself. The sound turns into a signal test beep and the sky is covered with color bars like the beginning of a VHS tape. Pause. Adjust the color until it is black and white. The beep continues.

GUIDE:

Dear author,

LYDIAN GALE PARR:

— says our guide, on our behalf —

GUIDE:

Leave me alone.

Guide covers one eye and one ear and holds the center of the room. Music, and an elegant final dance of almost-stills as each member of the audience is ushered wordlessly out of the room, during which ushering they are wordlessly given a wordless picture book of the Lydian Gale Parr's travels and as much tenderness as they will permit.

END