

SAMPLER

*A NEW SILENCE*

Joseph Massey

ALSO BY JOSEPH MASSEY

Full-length books:

*Illocality* (Wave Books, 2015)

*To Keep Time* (Omnidawn, 2014)

*At the Point* (Shearsman Books, 2011)

*Areas of Fog* (Shearsman Books, 2009)

Chapbooks:

*Minima St.* (Range, 2003)

*Eureka Slough* (Effing Press, 2005)

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*November Graph* (Longhouse, 2007)

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*Within Hours* (Fault Line Press, 2008)

*The Lack Of* (Nasturtium Press, 2009)

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*Mock Orange* (Longhouse, 2010)

*Another Rehearsal for Morning* (Longhouse, 2011)

*Thaw Compass* (Press Board Press, 2014)

*An Interim* (Tungsten Press, 2014)

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“We all have moments with the dust, but the dew is given.”

—EMILY DICKINSON

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# *For the Margin*

Night leaves in its wake  
a voice I don't recognize;  
an echo flagging  
in cold, bent  
by cold

and the dull thud  
of a 40 watt bulb.

At the seam  
of panic  
dawn erodes  
the hour

while I wait for you,  
the nameless,  
to pronounce  
the hollow

of what I'm not—

the poem  
you already are.

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# *The Reprieve*

A week  
that freezes, thaws,  
and freezes again.

The skyline scales  
and cracks.

Morning's frayed

gray plumes  
pull through the wreck  
and the wreck in mind.

To be reminded  
there's grace  
in ordinary weather,

in the reprieve  
from neon  
and clouds low enough

to cloud thought. Grace  
in daylight, the drowse  
and sway;

and how, when it's this  
thin, things barely cling  
to their names. Grace

to be nameless, a form  
among forms, drifting  
in January glare.

Grace, too,  
when windows  
reflect and distort,

at night,  
the shape of a room.

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# *Present Conditions*

Today the weather within  
is the weather without.  
Even the wind is broken,  
stammering over gnarled stalks  
and black bulbs punctured through  
snowpack. I'm alive  
in the contrast, dragging myself  
from a dream, eyes adjusting  
to the bright. In a semaphore  
of stripped limbs  
the sun, segmented, multiplies.

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# *Reaches*

The draft that lifts the page

slips through  
solid wall, evades

an origin.

•

It isn't like anything else—  
this monochrome expanse

at the edge of March. Cloud  
frozen above a public works lot.

How far now below zero.

•

Monday's bottom-upped sun



scumbles over new snow

and your face, leaving  
only eyes at the center.

•

All the ghosts out  
in the open.

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# *Circumference*

Notice the damage  
arranged in rhythms  
that mimic  
cohesion, edges  
we think  
to find our grip.

The way rain  
decodes snow  
banked against  
the curb  
—sewer grate  
caked with mud:  
a few small nouns  
stuck there. Notice  
traffic's under-  
current of  
static, silence  
(as close as we  
come to it) parcels  
into speech. Notice  
the sunbeam  
split four ways  
by a spent shrub

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at the end of  
an alley—all  
of its rubble  
sagging into  
gravel, pinned  
to the flash.

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# *Late March*

And the mud again  
ripped open

at the seams, silver  
in afternoon's glow-

ering shine. Sunday  
slowly implodes

into itself: the hollow  
of a vowel humming

under the surface  
we strain to pull

our voice—  
*a* voice—through.

We've endured  
a certain dormancy

and arrived in time  
(out of time) to say it.

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To imagine we've  
said it, that it

could be enough.

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# *Sudden Bridge*

At the slack edge  
of spring, the day

falls behind and  
ahead of itself.

Stunted sumac under-  
lines abandoned

factory stacks;  
bricks flaking

into sky. Turn,  
see blue graffiti

ghost concrete—  
cracked slab banking

a seasonal creek.  
Beneath dammed-up limbs

a toppled yield sign  
flickers, and your face

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flickers, crossing  
the street, in glare

from a guardrail.

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# *Vigil*

A contrail arcs  
over the wreck. Snowbanks  
returned to gravel; litter  
and its language  
ground to grit. This excuse  
for spring. Nothing to see  
beyond a blind spot  
collapsing into afterimage.  
Nothing to hear beyond a voice  
consuming itself in an alley.  
How the world expands  
as a thought expands  
with the angle of the season.  
Between parking block  
and dumpster  
crocuses clarify  
their square of shade.



# *Forced Perspective*

Alley  
outlined  
in purple  
loosestrife.

Bewilderment—

imagine it  
possessed  
a tint.

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# *Otherwise*

Posthumous in spring, I

collapse into other  
rhythms, colors

—a palette unspooled

at the speed of  
dreaming, Forsythia

web each edge  
and edgeless gap

of a condemned home.  
A row of them

strained into a season  
where I stand

ahead of where  
I stood, the shell

of a word,

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of the air,

of what was  
or wasn't said.

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# *Blinds*

To listen  
is to see

when the light  
is a thing

felt in the ear—  
it rings

you awake.

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