Also by Paul Naylor

Poetry

*Playing Well With Others* (Singing Horse Press, 2004)
*Arranging Nature* (Chax Press, 2006)
*Jammed Transmission* (Tinfish Press, 2009)

Literary Criticism

*Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*  
(Northwestern University Press, 1999)
PAUL NAYLOR

BOOK OF CHANGES

Shearsman Books
The whole
is for D
my favorite
reader
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This is the heart of the *I Ching*: the breaking in of another view, over which we have no control, of which we understand little, but which asks us questions and puts us in a position of listening.

—Martin Palmer—
The poems in this book grow out of an extended encounter with the ancient Chinese book of divination, the *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, which is a collection of sixty-four hexagrams comprised of various combinations of broken (*yin*) and whole (*yang*) lines.

The *I Ching* is frequently divided into two sections—the first thirty hexagrams and the final thirty-four hexagrams, known as the “Upper” and “Lower” Canons respectively. The first two series of poems in *Book of Changes*, in which I work through the hexagrams in chronological order, constitute a dialogue with those two sections. As for their occasions—my mother’s death and, eight years later, my father’s descent into the underworld of Alzheimer’s disease—they arise from the listening grief assigns. Once we’ve asked all the old questions—why? what follows?—there’s little to do but listen. Most of our models in the West teach us not to listen to nature when death arrives, so we listen for a voice beyond nature, something or someone standing outside and presiding over the perishing world we see and breathe in. The models of the East, of which the *I Ching* is among the earliest, suggest we listen to, rather than beyond, nature.

In “Limbic Knit,” the third series in *Book of Changes*, I returned to the sixty-four hexagrams of the *I Ching* to accompany me through the gestation, birth, and early months of our daughter’s life. That event and the others that compose *Book of Changes* have awakened and deepened a perspective I take to be true: a person is not a piece of eternal private property, sealed off and saved from the impersonal forces of nature. A person is a part of, not apart from, nature. The *I Ching* informs us about what, not who, we are—energy ordered by chance and necessity in an ongoing process where everything and nothing is lost. That’s the other view that broke through as I listened, and what little I understood became these poems. Fragments they are—but fragments of a whole unassigned in advance, unfolding as change arranges us in its wake.
Upper Canon

in memory of my mother
The Creative

sky above and sky below
a bird flies between time
its form marked for memory
though hidden the first cloud
contains the last we know
this way soon descends

The Receptive

earth beneath earth
the constant brings
forth from its belly
ten thousand things on
each side of the abyss
begin to ascend
Patience

hawk cuts west
across the river
clouds darken the sky
wait on this side
heard it said
somewhere

Disagreement

darkness sets light
aside as the vault
filled and covered
memory floods my life
with the fact not
the thought of it
The Army

of the dead from
whom we hear so little
water runs below the
earth’s surface washing
recollection away of
what once was her

Unity

pine boughs bend
beneath snow’s weight
white balanced by green
shadow by light
between the two is
one I understand
Restrain the Lesser

wind from the southwest
blows above the tree line
turning east against
the grain of sight
gives way to
sound

Walking Cautiously

on ice each step
across the lake
enlightened by care
only death creates
life we are told
leads us on
Peace

begins with breath
drawn in slowly
released to arrive
where one is
known as home
she’s there

Obstruction

snow surrounds the lake
light blocked above
keeps us awake
to what’s
in the
way
Allies

pheasant spreads her wings
wings cover those who gather
as snow falls each before
the other says I do too

Great Harvest

ew snow across the ridge
mountains rise in the east
a small fire burns below
the summit warm enough for two