

We counted the dead

& the people went about in masks

& safe distances

& drank wine over the internet

& sang alone in their living rooms

& hoarded yeast while the berries came in from the fields

& rotted in their boxes

& in the year of our lord 1691

& the year of our disaster 2020

& 33 from colick and wind

& 66 from evil which back then was Evil with a capital E

& we whisper the word at the man whose brain is a failure

& who kills by the numbers

& one so far for every day of a year in the city

& I told you to leave me alone

& we nailed the sick into their houses

& left one light on in the theaters

& the glowing empty stages

& 88 from rising of the lights

& the stages of a disaster first blame the other

& then pretend on the beaches

& half a million in 77 days

& 56 killed by several accidents

& 11 found dead in the streets  
& disasters take no turns  
& are not polite  
& everyone leaves everyone alone  
& they rubbed the sick with bloody birds  
& repented with whips in the village greens  
& quarantine means ships waiting in the distances  
& quarantine meaning 40  
& the children play alone in the streets  
& corona from crown from the PIE root to bend  
& the rain fell upon the earth for 40 days  
& 40 nights  
& the numbers double and double upon themselves  
& in this city the rain of bullets slows to a trickle slows to a mist  
& 25 from murdered  
& only 12 from grief  
& bend but not break  
& break from Old English meaning to injure  
& to divide solid matter violently into parts  
& ashes ashes we buy all the groceries  
& I write you letters you will never read  
& ashes ashes we need more machines  
& the storefronts ache with darkness and stark signs

& closed for the apocalypse

& ashes ashes we all stop work

& pray for us now in this the hour of our death

& we all fall down

## Radiation parable

& at the appointed hour the sun  
& original fire heaving itself ablaze out of the sea  
& the sea running away from the fire drying itself on shore  
& the spire of our lady falling into flame and scaffolding  
& time our only explanation for the sun  
& twenty three hours fifty six minutes  
& the sun our only reason for time  
& the phone call the one that said they found something  
& my body the opposite of a treasure hunt  
& always the left breast  
& 20 years of call backs  
& sometimes they find what others already found  
& the spire falls into flames  
& sometimes something new aglow in this density of flesh  
& the people sing  
& the the sun crawls out of the ocean  
& the people kneel on the pavement  
& 23 from frightened but 46 from grief  
& the sun washes up abandoned by the stars

& the sky empty except for the warrior birds  
& the shore adorned with shining tiny dead fish  
& 56 from drowned and 4 from burned  
& 1500 infants with their scant handful of dawns  
& the sun survives daily the sea  
& the sea survives the shore  
& they saved some of our lady from the fire

Kinship parable

& what if this is all we have —the neverlasting wood

& the ocean dying of plastic

& the yearning for those who also yearn —those unbridgeable unbreakable spaces

& the imagined silence among the stars

& what if this is all we have —this brief sleep inside the hearts of clocks

& our one broken beloved moon

& the way our skin crumples into bark

& the endless hungers of men

& the way we say endless when we know better

& the cemeteries we can't live inside

& the graves we approach with longing

& dread

& the dead we collect in ringlets

& the way we make our bodies into nurseries

& into furniture —a bed for the baby to howl from

& buy horses for her shelves that she may know thunder

& make for her a set of teeth from bones collected in the meadows

& make for her a set of wings from the crow's old unneeding

& make for her a heart grown inside the heart of a monster

& call her your daughter

The things they know

That it takes eight minutes and twenty seconds for light  
to arrive

That light slows or speeds depending on the medium

That this is called the refraction index

That if I were on the moon it would take 1.5 seconds for you  
to hear the moment I woke and spoke your name

H.G. Wells: *time is only a kind of space*

Refraction is a change in direction

That gap means you are always somewhere in the past

Poe: *space and duration are one*

That gravity is the way space bends around objects, the way time bends  
around a body

Einstein: *Space tells matter how to move*

Space is a funny thing even though I am

nowhere near the moon and you are

A curse I work back off the paper after it began  
as blessing or prayer

Somewhere north of here I whispered your name before  
we ever met somewhere north of here

it had just begun

to snow



[We lived so long in the fire]

& we lived so long in the fire we got used to the fire

& golden light acetylene blue at the edges

& the withering heat

& we loved the word annealed

& licked and blistered

& all our legends featured snow

& all our dreams were of water

& all our houses were temporary

& all the fish became dragons

& learned to swallow fire

& sheet lightning baked the vacant stars

& every bird a phoenix

& every child a cinder

& every illness a fever

& every lover a river

& all the rivers dried

& the stones filled the beds

& all the questions became matches

& answers lanterns

& all the apertures held oncoming trains

& icebergs were the dream of teeth

& the dream was a balm

& we peeled each other's blackened skin

& put it in our burning mouths

& called it sacrament

Apocalypse looks different than we thought

& the oaks throw their hard their bitter children from the heights

& wait or do not for what might survive

& what might open into growth

& the ocean is full of the lamplit dead

& worn down to isotopes the ones in the bones the ones that identify origin

& therefore catalog longing

& we apply with forms to be merely ourselves

& the ticks fill the meadows with danger

& the ticks fail to fill the boxes

& we are therefore refused care

& the ocean hides the broken crowded boats

& object lessons shaped like neighbors

& lovers refugees children

& the pollen clings to the empty hives

& clings in the useless lungs

& one mother pushes her child through the indifferent waters

& pushes love past death love past hope

& every bay each inlet is a prayer unanswered

& the dead child finally slips under

& our attention drifts toward some other catastrophe

& I keep saying *we* as I assemble papers

& listen to the heart's faltering rhythms

& I keep saying *we* while the bullets lie exhausted in the running gutters

& the virus waits in our faces in our untouchable skin

& I keep saying *we* but what I mean is I loved you once

& don't anymore