

MOON
Grammar

poems
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Matthew Porto

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B O O K S

MOON GRAMMAR

Poems

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For L—

“I’m making something for you.”

To [the angels] God's creation of a living world of good and evil and His concern for it seem some sort of majestic whim that nettles them, for they assume—probably more rightly than wrongly—that behind it lay a weariness with their psalm-singing purity. Constantly hovering about their lips are amazed and reproachful questions like: “What is man, O Lord, that You are mindful of him?”

—THOMAS MANN, *JOSEPH AND HIS BROTHERS*

In every life, there's a moment or two.
In every life, a room somewhere, by the sea or in the mountains.

—LOUISE GLÜCK, “PRESQUE ISLE”

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I. The Angel

THE ANGEL SPEAKS

Even from Here, I've come to know you.
My kind disapproves of my interest—
they call me *exoticist, colonizer*.

You know better.

You, standing still in the garden
with an idle shovel leaned against your thigh,
entranced by the jay's squawk, by its movements
as it carries sunlight on its wings
into the darkening elm boughs;
and you on the subway car,
regarding the frozen tunnels with sympathy,
with recognition of a familiar pressure, of mutual suffering,
as the train lights shove the dark forward. . . .

Most of my kind, when they come,
take pleasure in blinding you,
in watching you fall to your knees.

But I am here to say *Get used to the light*.

THE ANGEL AFTER EDEN

When I saw what He'd made in the garden,
I felt I'd fallen on my own sword—
harsh light passed through the very center of my body.

I was one of the few of my kind who loved them—
though they were pathetic:
huddled under a terebinth in the empty Crescent,
Eve exhausted and suddenly aware she was pregnant,
Adam wiping her forehead with his sweaty palm.

Then time came, slouching
through the Crescent's empty valleys,
out of crystalline rivers,
dragging shame, guilt, and terror
by a tight-woven rope.

Eve ran her fingers along her belly, tracing a circle;
Adam stood, his muscles tightening.

They were not harmed, only followed.



When the baby tore through her, I was sure she would die.
Time and its retinue looked on from one bank, I from the other.

She lived, and the child, too.
Time was, as always, indifferent, blank-faced.

What I felt was *pride*, as if *I* had made something,
having gathered the words to describe their image.

My sword fell to my side, its flame quenched.

THE ANGEL DESCENDS TO JACOB

The whole of creation's drama before me:
the wheel and what turns it,
starlight on turned soil, stones clenched in riverbeds,
crystal, pines that reach the road
wrapping the mountain, a serpent
waiting for twitchy prey beneath a cedar.

What man has made now makes him—
I follow my first human thought like a scent.



I find the patriarch at the shore, where the ocean
offers up an endless sacrifice of shoal,
shell, and seaweed—the sand takes
the press of the struggle, whirls at each wing-beat;
he bleeds at the forearm and knee;
his soft flesh purples below the jaw from a chokehold.



Bright dust falls from my feathers
as the present pours into the eyes of
contender and contender, leveled in exhaustion—
we straddle sand, hands on hips,
heads bowed to pelvis, lapping air.

Crab-shadow, shadow of dune
there at the sea's altar, the littoral,
where even sunlight rests. . . .



Collecting myself, I take off
for the empyrean. Below,
every laughing, hulking thing
shoulders the wheel; road swallows mountain—
starlight, pines, all.

Israel, I named him:
the one who believes all that is
is God's, and fights it anyway—
my last human thought before the world vanishes.