

'Address to the Long Road' (nonfiction lyric essay in response to Joanna Newsom's *Have One on Me*, originally published in *Coldfront's Poets Off Poetry*, 2010, <http://coldfrontmag.com/poets-off-poetry/address-to-the-long-road-by-claire-donato>)

ADDRESS TO THE LONG ROAD
Claire Donato

To drift along inside Joanna Newsom's music, which has (under)scored my most profound relationships and has seeped—continually seeps—into my mind. To depict my mind, '...', using ellipsis: the omission of details herein is not intended as a gesture to protect the innocent; there is no safeguarding: 'I claim my mind,' I claim my mind. Nor is that which appears to be the most direct statement ever the most direct: I claim my mind, which dwells inside three records—*The Milk Eyed Mender*, *Ys*, and *Have One On Me*—the latter being that from which I borrow cues for this.

To name a few important things. It is early June 2010. I am sitting on a train to New York City from Providence, Rhode Island. Sky is overcast. There has been, is always, an ending. To end, to be drunk, to desire, to dwell in multiple minds, to inhabit several bodies at once. To remain mindful, involved, and perplexed. And to recall—begin with a voice. What do you say to someone who disapproves of a voice? Say, 'Surrender to the mothball, which keeps away the moths.'

To "Clam, Crab, Cockle, Cowrie," 2004, "Sawdust and Diamonds," 2005, and to "Good Intentions Paving Company," 2010. To claim my mind again. To guard it again. To love another through an alcoholic haze—again from a distance—turn back: let the luminous image appear, the mind black against it. What image belongs to the present? I felt the door open, letting in this cold shapeless. My mind remembers, will never forget.

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Relationships involve records. To begin (again), there are individuals, and there are records. And there are endings each record transcends. Each record, each ending, transcends each individual with whom each recorded ending is associated. Without records, each ending would no longer exist, would no longer entangle the mind. Each ending entangles the mind. And each ending is held in the body, the mind, that little wooden box which contains signification, dissonance, and lyrics. Lyricism: nervousness contained in the body that, in the end, transforms into a woolly, tangled skein that loops around the brain's core, which is turning now to endings. And so let us begin with an ending. Let us begin now by ending.

It was three o'clock in the morning, although you never paid attention to time or listened to anything. I repeated myself over and over; again, it was impossible to measure if you'd heard. *Tick-tock*, you sounded, your eyes growing dark. *Tick-tock*, you erupted, my time bomb, my ending. *Tick-tock*, the walls echoed, reflecting nothing to speak of at all. *Some nights I never go to sleep*, and some nights I accompany my body on its voyage into your chest. Once I read through your sea in my fog, my ivory hopeless, I will have read with disdain, and an unprecedented sheet of loss will enter my body, my mind, which kindly partitions itself. So there's rope—string that hangs from a dress—and some semblance of order. What must I embody? What will unravel this

crisis, dear trumpet, dear sheet of paper on the floor? And it is impossible for you to ever know whether these nouns all relate to you, my former. Nor is everything recorded here entirely factual: one always distorts another living being's record in one's mind, in memory's ugly veneer. Like this. *Have One On Me* is a living record insofar as it has been imprinted and reprinted inside my brain, my body, my mind. Thus, in a sense, my mind rings, reminding me not of the past, but of the future: a momentary eclipse that transcends itself, blocking out no light.

* * *

A mnemonic device:

By the time you read this, I will be so far away

Daddy Longlegs, how in the world am I to be expected to stay?

I have been so drunk ('bottle of white, bottle of red') and have had to coordinate unconsciousness by looking through a window somewhere far away from the city, my city, a city in which you—I once lived. (Say 'and' and connect the pronouns—but no—not again, never again.) That night, you told a story that triggered my mind, thank you. Now where is my mind? Alone, somewhere concrete or abstract, I think of you, pull the trigger. Mind is a fish. Pay attention.

* * *

Relationships form by listening, which moves and is defined well beyond devoting one's attention to a sound.

I insist that I have heard a recorded voice's sound because it is now part of my body, my mind, my total viscera; and so it seems the sound is related to all I contain.

With my heart, I am trying to contain some things. Things, little impressions related to and separate from the mind's dwell in the brain, one source of anxiety. *I was tired of being drunk*. Were there bodies? There are always bodies.

We crack. We cracked. We both want. Nor am I the only one to have ever relinquished control, which cracks out from your mighty jaw and turns this time line inside out, making this sequence fall into, out of disorder. In the middle of the woods, I knew you once, felt the cold. Scent of sweat mixed with lavender, asphalt. And on the mantle, the most evil book, which, when placed over the face, caused me to stop breathing. Oh, my grainy film, my melancholy dog. *It's been a long time—how are you?* I too have become a ghost. 'To burn and twist and grimace against you'... Now night is a ghost, and the woods too. Now gauze again; again, your back turns toward the little brook facing the cluster of houses. Only you can follow this, say, 'may I touch you,' and look away.

Goodbye from afar, my word, my tired insufficient. How in the world in the night do you stay where you are?

You stay where you are.

* * *

You stay where you are. We stay in two places. I go for a walk. The night envelops it. My foot presses down into a mood, a most basic feeling. *Our nature does not change by will*—does it? In winter, your frozen skin takes on the most grotesque shade of blue, and your beige walls are so callous, forbidding and enclosed. A formation of tissue forms over my bones, and water pools inside your shallow basin, your wicked heart. *We pray I am the one to save you*, and the woods enclosed by red cake over rouge, noir as birch. Rouge rinses out; again, water surrenders. Thus, I fall asleep in this opaque. I lie awake. We stay up all night, and all is nocturnal, a moonless cluster of buildings. Where decisions are made, the basement smokes time, and a flute sounds through the air, one hallucination. ‘Say something, god damnit.’ And something is said. Something I cannot remember, will never forget.

* * *

There were others. There are always others. And *there is another who is a little older* who carried me into my new anonymity. Now I am estranged from myself: I go for a walk without face, reflect shop windows, dog collars, and the sun, the sun, the sun. Oh, my sun, my late, my crooked loveless: make yourself known. Transform into endless.

* * *

I will pack all my pretty dresses

I will box up my high-heeled shoes

A sparkling ring for every finger

I'll put away and hide from view

There is always premonition, and always too, the feeling you and I were never, are nevertheless. I write you a letter, choose never to mail it. Or, ‘I will,’ transforming to ‘I’ll,’ literally contracts, affecting (effacing) the body, the mind. And thus ‘I’ enters into a contractual agreement with ‘myself.’ ‘I’ becomes ‘myself.’ And it is not uncanny that the word ‘will’ echoes the language of a bequest, a list of what I will you: a tarnished spoon, a library book. My torn dress.

Everywhere I tried to love you / Is yours again and only yours.

* * *

The heart is a muscle that contracts seventy times a minute. Listen. I am writing about being boiled down. I have alluded to your collection of rings, your blue birds, your jaundice. Do I stay sustained by that which was already said, that which wasn’t? Once again, you arrive. Once again, what is said has already been said and is never straight forward. And there are reverberations: ‘starry, starry, starry’; ‘no-no-no’; and ‘I regret, I regret.’ All my weight is positioned atop my subject’s shoulders, and I am caught within or upon him. I am in love with him. Does this make me a fish? Fade to black.

