

# DEFINITIONS

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(333) You cannot receive understanding unless you know first that you possess it. In everything there is again this sentence.

-The Sentences of Sextus

(25) Do not despise the lamb, for without it one cannot see the door.

-The Gospel  
According to Philip

(26) No one can encounter the king while naked.  
(Ibid)

(21) [C]hildren living in a plot of land that is not theirs. When the owners of the land come they will say, 'Surrender our land to us.' They, for their part, strip naked in their presence in order to give it back to them, and they give them their land.

-The Gospel According to Thomas

## DEFINITIONS I

\*

The figures of love decamp from her rhyme: how is it they wait there  
foliate, hooved, half unborn?

\*

Why are they only when you most feel: follow your own warmth in along  
night-winds asking?

\*

If I touched you, like this, here: or if I lost my hand in what we thought was  
skin: if skin wasn't that at all?

\*

Would the wet night streets be proven: would I be a street noisy with news  
of rain drummed on tin, coming with pieces, misapprehended flowers or  
frogs, maps that turn familiar in your hands?

\*

Your body never ended we just forgot who was asking: the answer  
changed with every offer, it was a picnic along the Promethean cliffs, or  
were we hungry, or just the radiant remainder?

\*

I'm in someone else's memory she said I think my turtle's cooked and  
climbed out from the center of the world into a Western dream the warmth

of her bed folded into the trees: so who was she, like the wrong place,  
wrong time, she says *kiss me or we're in trouble*.

\*

Logic is gruesome because humans are evil, the desire is what's  
redemptive: I dressed in all the skins too sincere to fool anyone, I was a  
row of lilacs, an old manor, the sky pretending not to fit its clothes; I let  
you remind me of more than I could bear.

\*

The sentence follows the most fulfilling path: its syntax a landscape you  
once drove through, how did you ever forget your caravan was full of  
explosives; did someone hand you a flower?

\*

You showed up in all your armor: there was the green knight, waiting on  
the field, demand his name but what if there's a secret in your gorget, a  
word in your visor all those angles you only found by giving it away? Who  
is he not to ask you a question?

\*

A tree doesn't remind you of anything: what if it leads you somewhere; if  
you were a ferryman where would you take me?

\*

A tree in the guise of a man: the stranger stands at a sink, just stands there,  
letting the water rush over his hands, but where?

\*

Once I heard the rain in one of my single-dome mosques as if each drop were from a different sky: now tell me, stranger, is not forgetfulness a quality of rain; don't I look like your father, just a little bit?

\*

Who are you to chart the mysteries of the cosmos: did you ever feel naked; did you have wings before you tried to hide under them?

\*

Did you ever watch an Ibis' reflection quiver on the wind in a bird bath: watch it drift toward the circumference, a sediment of attention- but whose?-carried by the nibbling ripples; did you think you could stare straight into the sun?

\*

The hanging vines are in bloom: if you walk beneath them it will be wet; if I keep talking do I have a lover? Where does water come from?

\*

Bone is a door, porous, though you can't feel it opening: there is a camel being bleached by the sun; see the vapor rise from it, how it tells you where to go?

\*

Two birds fly parallel: news of the sky, that there is one; and lightning, do birds fly in lightning? Can you do both?

## DEFINITIONS II

### (White Jacket)

\*

If you're here to hoard up the pleroma: steal the sweet sound of mule-bells, and the high arches of Rio; do you give all that away, to reach the end of the sentence?

\*

The cold of Cape Horn, and its grim silent telling: where does it go if all you notice is the warm coming in; did it go anywhere?

\*

They think I ascend the rigging to be nearer the stars: but is it not the business of stars to ascend, and did they know I had my eyes closed; or that someone's been writing in my journal?

\*

What brings a bird to this songless place: to the slush and swab of one's mouth around its sea-mantra; what's that albatross doing up there in the crow's nest? How short can a symphony be?

\*

I arrived on a Peruvian man-of-war, with all the trappings: we cling to substance, you hold onto the mast and I come; hold onto your ship and white sail on the horizon I come from elsewhere, so what is a ship, really? Can you steer by why instead of where?

\*

You thought my jacket was a bird, then a shark: you saw the prince with a white feather from the toucan in his crown; is there an omnivorous color?

\*

The captain is an axiom of silver-keyed flutes and flageolots: the sea is a little girl, a redundancy of her own sea; but did you ever dream you were a wave, eager with sharks or cod, with gifts that wake you from the other side of this hull?



### DEFINITIONS III

\*

It's been said he ate the red crown: he swallowed the green crown and retained their magics; think back to all you ever ate, can you remember the heat?

\*

She was heat, getting a foothold on the earth, and it was you she ate: I know it doesn't look that way; but haven't you ever seen the sun walk out from the hills?

\*

The phrase is what teaches the word: verbing eerily like the weather, like a factory town where you stand among the dusty relics; but aren't dreams a reliquary? What do they listen to?

\*

Envision yourself dancing: do you envision yourself envisioning in stillness; is thunder not contingent on the presence of a Dutchman?

\*

They say the next town is right past this tree: would you give her your ape to get there; did you know you had an ape?

## DEFINITIONS IV

\*

Take hold this piece of driftwood: see how quickly your sensorium inhabits this stick, this seashore; but where does it end? Does it end?

\*

The interminable bow's drawn slowness: whence ogham's "go"; an alphabet of motive, stepping through different cities.

\*

The inquiry crumbles in your hands: the coast itself is an emphasized character; but did you ever lift up its sand; lift a shovel-full and find the green water slicing beneath it? Slicing what?

\*

The sentence has no exit: but is the motion of bare desire clothed in correspondences; kill the boy by the sea.

\*

What does the moment care about: what happens without reservations; did you ever step on something in the wet grass? Or was it somehow already in your hands? Or was it nighttime?

## DEFINITIONS V

*(for RK & CM)*

\*

To watch the body's noisome sense partner off with the breeze: isn't that what eating is, to give all that away?

\*

I once owned all this: did you ever miss your stop, and it wasn't the same anymore; and when you were selling cabbages, did they all go bad on you? Were you really selling anything? Were you the moon? Was I your hands?

\*

Did you ever grab onto the boat, and find you'd been holding it all along? That there was no boat?

\*

There's a seal on the street: or is it a girl drawing (her memory or the lines tracing their still wet flippers from the sea); or is it a dream? Is that what she calls me?

## DEFINITIONS VI

\*

You'll find a place: then another; but are they all already there? They say if you burn your map, every house is your mother being born. Is there always someone else in the room?

\*

You followed her to the Inn: is she the one who taught you silence, married her gait to your breath; and when she kissed you, were you outside again? Isn't that what outside means?

\*

What holds on as you seem to move: why would you believe you were moving rather than still; is motion what's convincing? Where else could you hide a stone? How else could I be bread, still, as if you'd never touched me?

\*

Same sonata different state, clouds climb behind the radio dial: did you ever call out the wrong name; did you ever open all the doors and glad your house with the sky?

## DEFINITIONS VII

\*

The air is best there, iron images bloom from its rose-trellis (images of the sun what else), behind them trees uprooted on the far bank: what leads to type over generality, to the description of thing; here the nameless statue holds her un-moulded sword, so who is she but there, in her own order; did you hide me behind this leaf you've never seen?

\*

What does she say to you from the round of stones, resting on her hip: that she could leave any time; that bronze is her Sunday outfit, that she's someone you already know, a painter living up the street?

\*

I always sit here but now it's raining too: same word wrong teleology, but did you ever put a word to your ear, like so, and hear the sea; listen to the craftsmen build their loose cities in the tidal hay? Can you hear them now, now that no one's listening?

\*

Tell what you don't know and answer with a question: isn't that what bodies do, Venus and Adonis, regardless of what they say; is the sentence a lover, a landscape, begging for what it doesn't know?

\*

Sometimes it's night with no moon: is there an order before it becomes a command; did you ever let your hands wander until they were innocent again?

**DEFINITIONS VIII**  
**(The Confidence Man)**

\*

Toucan fowl, fine feathers on foul meat: that's what I am, the food that says otherwise, can't be me, it's something else that's me; of all the people you've seen, did they all leave the same taste?

\*

Who are you now: is a consistent character not the rara avis, is the stock in hell not the same as heaven; aren't they the same city, anything goes, anything but nothing? Did you ever lie there on the warm cobblestones, and learn to read without a fate?

\*

When you found the resonance of desire, were you the great medicine, who operates, purges, drains off the repletions: or is the great medicine whoever you find there, standing next to it, watching the invisible vapor rise under what you seemed to see; is that operating, to give what isn't yours, just by being there? Watching the trees go by?

\*

A note on the flute plucks a harp within earshot: the heart's tone is the sound of listening; so what's listening? Did you ever start, or do you remember as you go along?

\*

This ship a city of devils: different outfits different thoughts; doesn't thought crash on that subtlety of skin, the city itself? Do you survive then, like a lost steamer, drifting along under every kind of leaf?

## DEFINITIONS IX

\*

No no no the kid said past the “comfortable Hudson of named things” with only words for wings: sit on the bench until you’re him again; does every moment have an answer, or is that what a moment is, to say it three times and put your hand through the sun?

\*

Where are you in relation: how quickly I forget who I’m talking to, am I talking; someone leaves or is it she brushed against me, I fell open, a book, a blue sky addressed to anyone in particular?

\*

Were we in the same place then: was the moon so many sequins; a thousand minds, each helpless with meaning?

\*

Did you ever strip yourself of motive: forget the animals back down the gangplank; put everything back where it belonged?

\*

What do the viewpoints have to do with coherence: but that each is attended, on its way; what if grammar was the exact point of departure, if just this once you tried the door?

## DEFINITIONS X

\*

Keep stripping thought of its concepts, glorious Odyssey of all your years: lose them overboard dusk till dawn, what's day then? Someone arriving, somewhere, before any certainty? Isn't that home?

\*

Let's be dumb again: some kids holding branches in the park; wasn't that enough, the feel of being about to do something? Isn't that when you start to talk, one hand on the switch that does the impermissible?



## DEFINITIONS XI

\*

Only strangers can operate on silence. The goblins in my ear roar to the passing train: order is what happens; did you become habituated, so you couldn't hear the lilies? Did someone ever sit next to you, just sit there, and say everything at once?

\*

She unweaves her web: I'm Adonis again, as dead as before; was I something you did to yourself, the way you show someone their own mind? Was I a gift from the other side of sense?

\*

Venus over a crescent moon: but did you know that then, when you walked off, a passenger in summer's heat; that the logic of night runs rampant, and its signs rest on ambivalent events?

\*

One day the scale tipped: the lady left her image and came all this way around; is she the one they call listening?

## DEFINITIONS XII

\*

There was nothing on my mind to begin with: vessels full of sky, waves to keep the shore in play; were you a gull, flown in the window we thought was called anywhere?

\*

A cicada in a tree: the dark lamp of sound tonight a window is the crossroads where an image is buried; where a man gets swallowed up by the earth and you learn everything you're not supposed to know.

## DEFINITIONS XIII

\*

I wish I could sleep outside: not by exertion, god forbid, just by being, where the leaves are a logic no one's invented, operating on their own silence. Who couldn't you meet there?

\*

If there's even a single tree in my mind I'll be happy: when do we get to find out; is a tree something you can't see, languaging wordlessly, its thoughts at arm's length?

\*

It takes a lifetime to be young again, arrive at what's there; to read is to be backwards, at last undoing those first awkward steps from the sea.

\*

That sea's still talking to me: it's how I know I'm awake but who cares, no one knows I'm here will know how I pushed my fingers through the waves how gulls roosted among the proclivities and I didn't dare snatch the sun anymore I didn't dare kill them; how they answer for what I can't do.

\*

Did you notice the stars: perceptions faster than you remember to be; they all return to the same position, did someone ask you the same question?

## DEFINITIONS XIV

\*

I could write a lament: if only I knew how things should be; is that what the fall means, making the rules up as you go?

\*

I used to write verses for the servants: would you like to know what happened, or is it enough to watch a sun set out of night and out of day?

\*

The coach stops: is it winter or Magyar forgotten mother tongue of torches burning just beneath the water, no ice no bridges; did you already get in? Were you there already, looking up through the reflection?

## DEFINITIONS XV

\*

The sentence is a motion pushing back on that other one: each moment with no one to lead, just the sky staring back at you hard as it can.

\*

One drifts along with convenience he said, who was he: but it's existence, existence alone can excuse our utterance of "Being;" my breaking this glass in your stupid house, my loving you anyway in this stupid place.

\*

The reality is what pushes back: piano for an altar sit down and I'll tell you who you are, most uncertain term you; remember when Jean-Baptiste Lully struck the conductor's staff into his fatal foot? Does it take the weight of your whole life to cut through, to paradise prayer into feel?

## DEFINITIONS XVI

\*

There's nothing slower than to let the sentence speak: let the phrase slay its requisite dragon; to be that dragon, and watch night's black logic pile up in the air.

\*

The end of anything curves away: touch is the function, forgetting the structure as it goes; night after night breaks from vanished prisons.

## DEFINITIONS XVII

\*

Iago never touched anyone: he fell on his sword, in one way or another; when your hand slid to the top of my foot, is what we needed so little, was that your final answer?

\*

What do you call someone who reminds you: is the moon a teaching that happened only once?

\*

There is only one place, one motion repeated in the dark of not knowing: the same hand reaches out, to memory or honey jar, or nothing at all?

## DEFINITIONS XVIII

\*

I've been thinking nothing of late: why is that always the question; can't you recognize the sun, when it beams directly through your head?

\*

The work of the day is a hunt: from one silence to the next, can you hear the night even now, its velvet thump against the noonday trees?

\*

What do you want by listening: to be the trees, deer stumbling through the bushes; or is that already it, is listening just what they need?



## DEFINITIONS XIX

\*

The country of the trees swung and waved around us: you snapped your visor on my hand my horse slipped; did you see my heart rise a red star glowing over the city?

\*

A man talking to birds: talking like a bird; do we need any miracle but listening?

\*

The french horns call from the other side of the sky you were galloping there; what kept you; did you stumble over a flower; did you turn around in your chair?

\*

When it rains, the mountain clouds smuggle bright pinions into the ruined castle, and sneak them out again: when the crappy bard says the moon is in your collarbones; what returns to this?

## DEFINITIONS XX

\*

Lady in white hanging clothes: white stone summer's, which moon is it but the moon always going somewhere; timid lettering of the words I still don't know how to spell, but do it correctly anyways.

\*

The sentence questions everything: scales for all you didn't need to know; and the witch who weighs less than her clothes, is she what remains, suddenly at the bottom of you?

\*

A knight must wander so far: to lose horse, armor, gender, anything; to see the horns of antelope curve up from the dry fields, and the moonlight wind around them.

\*

The spiral moon dances there among the horned toads: as I lie in the bushes, no one will believe me, have the thoughts I never had, go to this far away land of what's actually here.

## DEFINITIONS XXI

\*

Write the letters out of order: let the music speak language back to its original insanity; lightning rewriting those bibles we walk around in.

\*

It comes from far away: is it what you wanted, did you stop wanting, and just listen, as the unicorn brayed from its dusty corner of the windowsill?

\*

The sun was hot you removed your hauberk, head-dress, nightgown: you took off your armor; is this the question they tried to prevent you from asking, to remove the sun?

## DEFINITIONS XXII

\*

A lady learning her left: hand on the piano; unburnish the mirror, said the voice as concerning rocks or trees. Can you wash them disconcerting again?

\*

The stone chimes gave you away you were crushing ants, the contents of the world: but what happened when you listened again; had the chimes begun to snow?

\*

Quartz you put to your forehead don't eat it said the voice: mother where you least expect her, saying no to what you didn't know you were thinking; but you do it anyway. Is this what they call sleep, this feast of citrine and softest carnelian?

\*

Call it what you will I'll find you its opposite: is there one thing we haven't named you ask; just as the stranger in from the rain pries up your own name, did you see it under there; soundless, scentless, colorless, hurrying material of everywhere?