

**Convocation 2017
Tuesday, August 22**

**Draft
Lisa Bickmore**

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I begin with the story of his body,
if only because it so plainly was *his*, inked
with rough wing feathers brushing either side of

the clavicle, a sacred heart blazoned on
the inside of his forearm, visible as
he turned it, to argue or underscore a point:

and just above the knee, a history, or what
looked like one, evidenced by dates, the weight
of which I would likely never know. He met me

in my office. I listened to his brief, I made
my notes of it, his account of the eras
of his life: the years he had only himself

on whom to rely, then the year he joined the army,
the whole transcript of his efforts and near-misses
until, finally, he knew his purpose: and as

I listened, I understood my office, this talk,
as a gate he recognized he must pass through,
and when we were to say goodbye, he might

just as well take a heavy loop of chain, lift
it over a post, to close it, or perhaps I would,
being not the gate but its keeper: and as

he left, I thought I could see him consider which
of the parallel tracks to take, the one rough
with emergent rock, the other powdery,

packed with dust. I remember such a road

very well, and a bridge it led to, and how,
in summer, I'd watch swallows write paths in the air,

over the banks, skyward and waterward,
their movements more than chance but less than pattern,
since by flight they sought the various winged insects

of the watershed, all but invisible
to my eye. Every time I stood there, I practiced
tracing the loops, hovers, surges and plummets,

the oblique angle at which one bird came
toward me, close enough that I could see
the stripe of ochre banding its tail, and still

I knew I'd never see, precisely, what
it was after. Even this page: as I write,
an animal prowls its edges, a big cat

striped with yeses and nos, marked with strike throughs,
tentative, definitive, until it's inked
into another beast altogether.

Now the page is a plot, dark oblong,
the writing on it furrows for planting,
the eventual green to make neat rows,

a desired design: or a sheet of music,
a schematic drawing—this page could be
anything, and the anything it is

points to an eventual future something.
Out of a delirium of inapt
figures, there should be an arrival:

an inevitable aisle, a few words,
a document in hand.

A future presses
into view infinitesimally,

a geography changing over something

like aeons, but life-scaled, each written line
almost unrecognizable as script.

He left my office, tattooed with the signs
of who he was, who he hoped to be,
a story whose next turn only he could know

fully, and all my observations would never
change the fact that his future belonged to him,
it walked with him as a familiar: it might

reveal itself to him in a quiet hour,
it might instead arrive like a train passing
at one a.m., hurtling through a wild meadow,

its haze of pink flowers all but illegible
in the dark.