

Oracular Transcendentalism

Annabel Lee

ORACULAR TRANSCENDENTALISM

A POEM IN SEVEN PARTS

Part 1: Transcendental Splatter

experience is what's snatched from danger
no reasoning
no proof
just see what is
begin with intelligence and end up in the natural world

the moon the sun the planets
harmony of the spheres

a mink
a mother loon and two babies
a looney bin of about eight loons all singing at once
tracks of a moose or caribou
wild irises
hawks
many kinds of leeches
lots of soft and spongey leeches
seagulls
dragonflies and dragonfly nymphs
some beetle-looking things
snails
long leeches
fly-in fishermen
other canoeists
pink and purple and yellow wildflowers
tiny little red wildflowers
lots of little float planes
no rowboats
mushrooms growing on the ground and growing on trees
a beach made of birch logs
a very fat robin
minnows
a lot of beaver lodges
no beavers
yellow waterlilies
a lot of mosquitoes
squirrels
quite a few different kinds of spiders

crows
many other kinds of birds and bugs I don't know the names for
the trees were conifers
many bushes
marsh grasses
a grayish heron
terms
lady's slippers
distances measured in nautical miles
from the westbound transcontinental line
Armstrong is not a scheduled stop
phone in the request in advance
then throw the canoe in the freight car
and paddle north for several hours
 we met Jim or Jack
 who runs a \$30,000
 outfit with backhoes

Anita made pancakes,
fried eggs, fried
canned luncheon
meat and very
good coffee

 Bud is a car dealer
 in Kokomo, Indiana

“It was no superfluous rule he gave
who said, when you write do not omit
the thing you meant to say,” wrote
Ralph Waldo Emerson

 days go by
 walking
 footsteps
 not a minute to spare
in word art and walking art
Richard Long walked in lines
returned to Kant
and wrote what he saw
clouds, granite, red stones
he walked along riverbanks
explored planes of vision
revealed the elegance of time
the ancient timelessness of nature
and the cycles of living and dying

 the ancient northern kings had two criteria:
 first fairness was defined by weights and measures
 and the second criteria was a reliable means of exchange

the northern kings did not debase the currency

in Chinese thought wood is the first element
then earth and air and fire then water
the March winds disrupt the wood
trees swirl as if the corkscrew will yank their roots
violently out of the earth

all of a sudden the bank is in the way
they're doing TV commercials

I looked and I ran
I believed what I thought
without sour waves of shame
the life genuine
divine rigor divine extravagance
and do what I'm afraid to do

Jungfrau

this blue of her sky
is the blue of the virgin
the white is the white
that is pure light
and the absence of
anything but light
her empty rock form
breathes full-blooded life
at this height
above oceans and continents
from Sphinx Observatory
I see the Atlantic
and my home in New York
I see Amsterdam and Munich
and the shores of Lake Geneva
the lake with two names
Geneva and Lemman
it looks cold so white
so silver so blue so gray
two black jackdaws
swoop close enough
to see the murmuring
of their yellow beaks
my constellation
her terrible silence
and ferocious wind
her two constant sister peaks
face an ancient glacier

a sea of snow over permanent blue ice
death in her face
so beautiful
and the solitude of Jungfrau so pure
 on a pilgrimage of souls toward a common shrine
jackdaws are flying
wildflowers are yellow, plum-colored, white with pink edges,
blue and purple with orange centers
 a person needs about half a gram of oxygen every minute
taste is more sensitive to bitter quinine at
heights over 3,000 meters
 high altitudes stimulate red cell growth in bone marrow
our atmosphere is a gas shell surrounding the earth
 each of the gases in our atmosphere
 has its own special set of wavelengths
 oxygen
 nitrogen
 ozone
 carbon dioxide
the movement of the sun is
in reality
the rotation of our earth
 in the astronomical dome
 on the top of the Sphinx Observatory on Jungfrau
 the spectra of stars are studied
how old are the stars?
are they dead and sleeping in their moonless night?
is there cause and effect?
 there is sequence

the moon was naked
deaf to the silence

Jungfraujoeh
11,333 feet
3,454 meters

A. Guyer-Zeller
1839–1899
was creator of the Jungfraubahn

at night the air falls
 February is the lowest month
 on the dampness and temperature scale
 July is the highest
the largest glacier in the Alps
has its origin in the Jungfraujoeh
 below the glacier is permafrost

this glacier is 800 meters deep
determined by echo sounding:
an explosion produces elastic waves
the waves travel along the surface
and other waves are reflected
beneath the ice

time lag and oscillogram readings
determine the depth

the deepest location in the Atlantic Ocean
is on the boundary between two plates
just past San Juan harbor where one morning
dead fish were floating in the marina and
past that oceanic trench as far as the eye could see
off the Caribbean west coast
Culebra endured American military bombing campaigns
Vieques was overrun with feral dogs
while we made the Anegada crossing in a tug
with the piano in the sitting room
back in Fajardo the hurricane flung our Tahiti ketch
up on the shore and all my grandfather's Army decorations
were lost in the seething waves
somebody hold their hand that tight
ain't nothing gonna go in it
—you open it up it's gonna be filled with blessings
born in Hong Kong
raised in Nebraska

how does reading turn into knowing?
is reading a book different from reading a painting?

newly illiterate masses
walking on concrete

don't look outside
look inside
there's something you haven't yet unpacked
humans are the only animals
who work to pay for food
who pay for shelter
and cover their bodies with purchased costumes
to protect them from the weather
the nanny gets paid to take care of the children
the mother doesn't
the chef in the restaurant gets paid to cook the meal
the one who cooks at home doesn't

in Europe from the 1600s to the 1800s
many people were peasants
we call them peasants
and they farmed common land
some of the peasants farmed common land
and in 1846 there was the potato famine
how romantic was the American Indian rights movement in the 1840s?
Transcendentalists devoted their lives
to the antislavery movement and to American Indian rights

Emerson took the word transcendental from Immanuel Kant

in 1842 Emerson wrote "The Transcendentalist"
in 1844 a mathematician named Liouville
proved the existence of transcendental numbers
the digits of transcendental numbers never end
in 1882 a mathematician named Lindeman
proved that π is a transcendental number
 π ends the problem of squaring a circle

divine intuition
the dream

the rich colors of summer
the artist works instinctively
why not just be heartless?
when style changes change friends
art is more important than friendship
bypass approval
love is a bourgeois construct for wood nymphs
immortality is not serious
communication is the serious issue

a tisket a tasket
a green and yellow basket
memorize my memory
a wicker body's casket

knots are mysteriously untied
in transcendental geometry
brisk discourse
mathematicians agree: there are many more transcendental numbers than
algebraic numbers
examples of the endless knot
mysteries
keys to infinity

fractals delivering order and beauty
fractals invented or fractals found

the same
transcendental geometry is the eggshell
turning itself inside out
without cracking

the empty traitor
defying worship

for the Egyptians
writing equipment was believed to be
needed in the afterlife
the vulture and the cobra
ebony
ivory
gold
divine inscriptions
a sun god supporting the barge of the moon
two games played in ancient Egypt: passing and thieves
hieroglyphic lions are mountains
in the sacred geometry of the great pyramids

they are alchemists
they turn sweat into sugar

she told the child,
“listen, the bird is speaking to you”

Paul Valery’s footsteps inspired
Frederic Mompou’s Musica Callada book 1 number 7:
the angelic transcendental composition

Thoreau said “the purest science is still biographical”
schools and solo fish
glide by reeds
avoid onslaughts
from the long delicate throats of egrets
white
white like swans
whiter
white as sugar cubes
the pond smells of rainwater
blue and sky above

Part 2: not the Jokerman

“I was simmering, simmering, simmering.
Emerson brought me to a boil.”

—Walt Whitman

bluebirds not the human condition
rufous-sided towhees not admiralty law
robins not distant ships
pigeons not tossed by a hurricane
ravens not rules of the game
crows not checkers
garter snakes not pawns
greyhounds not castling
great blue herons not family court
ruby-throated hummingbirds not table of contents
larks not judges taking bribes on the side
chimney swifts not law of the jungle
koi not rules of the road
box turtles not list of ingredients
raccoons not the Bohemian Club
Maine coon cats not the Holy Grail
Siberian white tigers not hung jury
gray wolves not Magna Carta
guppies not the Constitution misinterpreted
calico cats not false-hearted lovers
poodles not burning in a fiery furnace
Barbados black-bellied sheep not the bombing of Move
wild boar not code of conduct
Nubian goats not ten-yard penalty
dolphins not grasping at straws
lizards not temporary restrictions
pugs not 1984
Holstein cows not lowering the bar
sea turtles not the Inquisition
flamingos not the ten commandments
goldfinches not strip searches
dragonflies not stress test
grizzly bears not the Red Queen saying, “Off with their heads”
barracudas not the stock exchange
elephants not steel pulse of industry
clams not Rust Belt
donkeys not justice of the peace
Appaloosa ponies not standard operating procedure

blowfish not follow the script
lobsters not stick to the recipe
rattlesnakes not weights and measures
penguins not company policy
fennecs not business ethics
falcons not dictionary and thesaurus
toucans not all roads lead to Rome
yellow-bellied sapsuckers not doctrine of discovery
squirrels not the sword and the sceptre
white mice not follow the sheet music
green frogs not pattern cutting
trumpet swans not break point
geese not Rizzo and Giuliani
coyotes not broken windows
beagles not mandatory evacuations
ants not padlocks
llamas not the prison industrial complex
gorillas not staplers
giraffes not rubberband man
crawfish not exact measurements
deer not Robert's rules of order
swordfish not boy scout handbook
grouse not high stakes
whales not the Silk Route
elk not cookie cutter plans
skate not navigational chart
lions not new world order
dachshunds not God's Army
goldfish not a bear trap
red-tailed hawks not reckless endangerment
bullfrogs not weapons of mass destruction
golden eagles not mineral rights
minnows not corrosive elements
salamander not white supremacists
jellyfish not neo-Nazis
coral not battleship gray
hamsters not aircraft carriers
meadowlarks not plutonium
yaks not splitting atoms
black widow spiders not redlining
magpies not militarized police departments
Siamese cats not flak jackets
praying mantis not bulletproof vests
mallard ducks not three strikes
macaws not dumping PCBs
hermit crabs not tanks
egrets not drug wars
Komodo dragons not marching band uniforms

bald eagles not parole officers
Dungeness crabs not big pharma
pelicans not multinational banks
banking is ruled by the dark side
Pomeranians not keystone kops
sharks not big money
chimpanzees not Molotov cocktails
worms not uzis
uzis are Israeli open-bolt, blowback-operated submachine guns
iguanas not cointelpro
moths not an eye for an eye
peacocks not cathecism
hornets not cruise missiles
kites not stealth bombers
badgers not drone warfare
eels not collateral damage
pandas not the banality of evil
bobcats not PTSD
rattlesnakes not extraordinary rendition
black bears not rape, torture and slavery, intrinsic evil
woodpeckers not surveillance
turkey buzzards not threats and insinuations
mink not neutron bombs
parrots not ethnic cleansing
beavers not genocide
parakeets not orthodox bureaucracy
otters not industrial agriculture
oysters not military industrial complex
black adders not stop and frisk
coquis not anal cavity searches
horses not technological miracles
terns possums rainbow trout guinea hens
reindeer striped bass woodcocks muskrats
seagulls painted turtles monkfish lemmings
border collies fruit flies herring periwinkles
sparrows butterflies red-winged blackbirds
Portuguese men-of-war catfish Siberian tigers
gazelles hyenas queen bees yellowtail tuna
voles jackals fireflies turkeys wrens jaguars
octopus canaries hippopotamus seals polar bears
grackles Orphean warblers rock thrush nightingales
martins yellow-breasted buntings nuthatches
puffins aardvarks ant-eaters orangutans
angels not fools
dreams not nightmares

Part 3: the experiment of living

to know that we do not
know what we do not know

Thoreau told us
what is necessary

food shelter clothing and fuel
the internal combustion
of the lungs

not kingly
not manly
strong and valiant

with the enthusiasm of lovers
a bay horse
a turtledove
my own breath
the yellow violet

I too had woven
a kind of basket

war and peace
the railroad and ice trade
banks of the Neva
St. Petersburg
they are no better than
wooden horses

a naked thief
my jacket
your old clothes
the molting of fowls

this oracular sentence

something quite simple
printing is skin deep

in his skin dress
at first bare
plays house as well as horse

in the open air
savages
farmers
merchants

the blushes of Aurora
the celestial empire
an ox cart

kiss the earth
prevent the killing

handsome houses
richer than the richest
the ice in the pond was
not yet dissolved
apparently without inconvenience
spring springs
the quaking
pine boughs

more the friend than
the foe of the pine trees
a porch at the entrance
to a burrow
without the sugar
a September gale
over him or under him
two second-hand windows

the experiment of living
one turn down the harbor
as broad as it is long

not awed
in Concord
I should never have
broken a horse

much more admirable
the Bhagavad Gita
barbaric and heathenous

potatoes rice
rice mainly
drinking water

the wilderness of nuts and meats

various fermentations

I forgot the rules

the root
faith

three chairs
exposed to the light of heaven

entangled in a spider's web
avoid the beginnings of evil
dance and sing for three days
picking huckleberries

the curse of trade
attaches to the business
worse mischief

wait wait wait wait wait
follow the north star
...an Emerson reference
...begin again

who goes alone may go today
to do good
to save the universe

begin where you are

curious mistakes
down to the skin

we make herb tea for the sick
being a microcosm himself

green apples
Eskimo

never dreamed
the holy

without apology
do not stay

cypress
bears no fruit
always flourishing

transitory

be liberal as the date tree

your natural stupidity

bounteous acts

see the spring come in
bounding on the river

some young birches

*when first I took up
my abode in the woods*

a goddess might trail her garments
through the stream of time

I found myself suddenly
neighbor to the birds

the scarlet tanager
the whippoorwill

my most distant horizon
the wood thrush

the earth
far from noise and disturbance

Part 4: Arrowhead

hearth fires burning or the TV: living fires
rituals or spectator sports: live rituals
tribe or crowd: extant tribe
feelings or moods: feeling alive
goddesses or bitches: lively goddesses
cycles or straight lines: wheel of life
sunlight or electric lights: life-giving rays of the sun
surgery or butchery: the scalpel slithering artfully recreating life
new deal or the grapes of wrath: the whirlwind
guaranteed income or class war: free distribution of food, clothing, shelter
free airwaves or corporate media control:
holding hands across humanity's breath
living language or dead words: exchange of free thought
tragic characters or villains: struggling in solidarity
sovereignty or capitulation: sacred power of all oneness
solvency or debtors' prison: the river of life flows abundant
one simple truth or a pack of lies:
knowing and speaking from that knowledge
as it is: not coulda woulda shoulda: as above so below

golden autumn leaves
match ochre paint
on the Melville House
on Holmes Road in Pittsfield
Arrowhead
with the clock pushed back
expect delays
bundle up
full harvest moon
winter's coming with a blast of snow
spring always returns

first take shelter
then assess the damages
don't take chances take the evacuation route
there will be a light up ahead
you may not see it at first
some things last longer than
I think they will
whale songs
the wailing of assaulted women
when I'm watching my TV
and an adman tells me
how white his world looks
how white my shirt is
where the harpoons take aim
the wave peaks glimmer
the ocean's crash echoes
the poet stays in the conversation
and all heaven's creatures thrive

Part 5: when does the past become past?

genuine wisdom transcends
the limited confines of ordinary mind

bioluminescent
with the clock
fascinating and mysterious molecular evolution
bacteria produces light
and fiber distributes the light
a whole array
a beacon in the ocean
this intricate cage lives for centuries
one of the oldest life forms on earth

biological
fiber optic
nanotech:
an intricate cage

letting go of the past
hurts
when the past becomes the past
there are extinct species in your memoirs

nature uses minimum material for maximum function
as in the case of Euplectella aspergillum or
Venus flower basket:
a species of sponge named for asparagus
or asparagus named for its fibers
biological fiberoptics
molecular evolution
the fiber distributes the light
a whole array
a beacon in the ocean
bioluminescent

with the clock
nothing escapes the wrath of humans

Part 6: the spiritual in abstraction

“I want to illuminate things
with my mind and to project
their reflection
upon other minds”

—Baudelaire

the essential
a symbolist art form
the essential the miracle
incalculable time
spatial or material the miracle essential

systems of higher meditation
examine optical reflexes
associated with mystical content
reactivating what was dormant
the nomadic tribe of intelligentsia

Navajo corn dancers
Eskimo wooden masks
Night Sounds by Jackson Pollock
Guardians of the Secret by Jackson Pollock
the altar transcends the particulars

Picasso breaks the object into pieces
scatters fragments of conscious rationality
gazes at the shamanistic relic
allows vibrations of color to permeate the display
conceals shapes in shapes with élan

the visible and the invisible formed
by vibration behind the skin of nature
in Holland in France in Germany
the Buddhistic thrall envelops
Western speculation

in Nicole Eisenman’s Arcadian bosque
brass bodies forged in Dusseldorf
relax by a temporary pool of water
in Münster sky blue paint from deleted graffiti
remains in the crevices

seven colors in the spectrum
parallel seven notes in the diatonic scale
for Kandinsky and Scriabin
whose expansion of divine worship
was *Prometheus: The Poem of Fire and Mysteria*

Kandinsky copied Rudolf Steiner's instructions
For meditation into his notebook
and researched taste as sound
and the experience of hearing colors,
seeing sounds, harmonic reverberations

naming beauty
form that's formless
an immaterial image
love is born
divine nature in art

sound vibrates color resonates
daily expectations of death
Dickens Poe Whitman
all discussed Emerson and transcendentalism
in 1842 and Marsden Hartley wrote of Emerson in 1944

abstraction transcended Blake
as Jasper Johns coated an open book
in red encaustic and Pollock
saw visions beyond Albert Pinkham Ryder
and circles became mystical celestial spheres

esoteric mystical symbols skitter across
planes of imagined temple walls
in Hilma af Klint's spirit world
where, some say, she invented abstract art:
whatever art is, whatever abstract means

Barnett and Annalee Newman were in Concord
for their honeymoon — visited the home
of Emerson: the sage of Concord
and Newman's painting *Concord*
paid tribute to the transcendentalists

is a painting silent?
can science explain paint?
the material world is both means and symbol
daily life was means and symbol for Thoreau
and Barnett Newman's white is the same

Ellsworth Kelly *White Square* oil on wood 1953
Yves Klein Monopink pigment and synthetic
resin on canvas and wood 1962
Mark Rothko *Plum and Dark Brown* oil on canvas 1964
Brice Marden *Green Study* oil on canvas 1982

Robert Rauschenberg told Brice Marden
the number 5 is the first of the complicated numbers
Marcel Duchamp translated passages from
German to French of Kandinsky's
On the Spiritual in Art (1912)

the veil
between
us and the eternal
is not
impenetrable

a great force
of nature
subtle
humble
irresistible

Part 7: Saliva

“If you want to kiss the sky
you have to learn how to kneel”
—Inxs

“It is our duty to disobey unjust laws”
—Gandhi

“Let them be sea captains”
—Margaret Fuller, referring to women

Margaret Fuller
born 23 May 1810

Buckminster Fuller’s grandfather was Margaret Fuller’s brother

a Margaret Fuller morning:
a cold sponge bath
the elaborate hairdo
jars of hairpins
layers of petticoats
rows upon rows of hooks and buttons

Madame de Staël’s novel *Corinne* was set in Rome
at 22 Fuller read of Corinne’s superior mind and her deep learning
ordinary rules did not apply to Corinne
nor to Madame de Staël
nor to Fuller

the intimacy between Madame de Staël
and her patroness Jeanne-Françoise Récamier
was the lovemaking of angels
and unlocked the love Margaret felt for Anna Hazard Barker
Anna Barker’s voice echoing in her ear
Anna Barker’s face
Anna Barker’s intellect

an unrequited love
Anna Barker married another inamorata of Margaret Fuller:
Samuel Gray Ward

Emerson said, “Her friendships, as a girl with girls,
as a woman with women, were not unmingled with
passion and had passages of romantic sacrifice

and of ecstatic fusion, which I have heard with the ear...
Had she been a man, any one of those fine girls of sixteen
who surrounded her... would have married her:
they were all in love with her..."

After the sudden death of her father when she was 25
she had to worry about money

Sarah Margaret Fuller continually reinvented herself

A maiden sat beneath a tree

so began
Miss Sarah Margaret Fuller

Kandinsky's red tree

The sacred stars looked sadly down

Edgar Allen Poe did not like the
"evident carelessness" of this poem
nor the "grammatical improprieties"—
"the soul is a cypher" he said in his review

Margaret Fuller wrote:
crushed in the dust her heart's flower lies

Hilma af Klint's astral rose

Edgar Allan Poe was not a fan
Margaret bristled if she perceived herself as slighted in the least
Poe found her arrogant, condescending and vain

Margaret was convinced of her own virtue and worth

According to Poe there were three classes:
men, women and Margaret Fuller
her strength a weakness for Poe
except when the two discussed the mild, courteous poet
Henry Wadsworth Longfellow
whose work they agreed was minor and imitative

Nathaniel Hawthorne considered his wife Sophia Peabody
half angel half idiot
and found Margaret irritating
too talkative too spirited

Emerson said Margaret had a “burly masculine existence”—
better than the seduced woman
forced into prostitution (the married or the unmarried kind) –
fascinating and revolting

Margaret saw English peeresses selling their daughters
to the highest bidder and compared them to Turkish slave traders
only she said the slave women were not as degraded
as the English damsels

Her father had overeducated her
She was the first woman with access to the Harvard College Library
She was the first editor of *The Dial*, the Transcendentalist quarterly
She wrote a treatise on women’s rights
Her delights: teaching and being a mentor to those her age and some younger
She found the male transcendentalists attractive
and loved many women as well

Transcendentalism:
quiet can become troublesome purity
we must look for a long time before we see
slowness is essential to science, to philosophy, to poetry
deep understanding is slow
silence can become calm
silence soothes the stimulated mind
silence evokes nostalgia for nature, the pure nature, simplicity

Thoreau lived on land he borrowed from Emerson
Raw earth and mystification

In New England Margaret Fuller was friends with Emerson
In France she was friends with George Sand
In England she was friends with William Wordsworth
In New York she visited poorhouses and insane asylums
and prisons—Sing Sing and The Tombs—and wrote newspaper stories about
those experiences for Horace Greeley
—in that *New York Daily Tribune* column she wrote:
“The county had been denuded of its forests,
and man cried—”
she wrote about injustice toward “the red man, the black man”
she claimed no one would dare intercede with
“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do”
and in that same column she said the color of a person’s complexion
does not determine who they are,
their value, their worth

She wrote many letters to friends
She suffered incorrigible headaches

The mind:
mind is not a blank slate
mind is free
creative
mysterious selectivity of the mind is
transcendental
transcending rational thought
according to Immanuel Kant

Margaret Fuller was a radical surrounded by Victorians

To her mind a woman is a shelter dog that never knew freedom
curiosity the drug
joy found in missing out, in the pause to reflect
to her mind Cleopatra walking into Rome was on a tearful trail

Margaret Fuller rewrote the story of the electrical,
the magnetic element in woman
the antidote to the harmony, the obvious order and self-restraining decorum
most expected of woman
feet on the ground
woman learns that all bribes have the same flaw
head in the clouds
Margaret Fuller's anger was characteristically regal

In her final contribution to *The Dial* in 1843
she demanded all obstacles be removed
to female participation in society and politics

Like all romantics, she valued poetry above all other literary forms

She admired Blake, the painter and poet,
whose life was a series of trances
and depicted spirits hovering over bodies

Some of her subjects:
Sibyl
Cassandra
St. Theresa
Leonora
Electra
Iphigenia
Panthea
Hecuba
Isabella
Victoria
Minerva

Rhea
Diana
Mecaria
Beatrice

When Margaret met the elderly poet Alessandro Manzoni
she found his deep thought distinguished him
like William Wordsworth and Thomas de Quincey
--she considered them the last deep thinkers

in Rome she joined the revolution of 1848-49
when men and women fought like lions
she got caught up in the danger and failure of the siege of Rome

Initially she concealed her marriage to an Italian marchese 11 years her junior
and her pregnancy and the birth of their son
And then she revealed all and reinvented herself again

Angelo was born when Margaret was 38
she changed her name to Margaret Ossoli
a secret marriage
a marriage of passion
not marriage like her friend George Sand
whose husband insulted and neglected her
“Madame Sand” she was called in Paris
Margaret wrote to Emerson: “she had every reason
To leave her husband—a stupid, brutal man”

“a woman at forty,” Margaret Fuller wrote, was “... always spoken and
thought of upholstery-wise”

People had always been put off by Margaret Fuller’s imperial air,
her dignity
and now were shocked that in her marriage
she talked and her husband, the Roman marquis,
listened
she talked
he listened
no ordinary love

her son Angelo’s Christmas
was Margaret’s first Christmas
Christmas was too pagan, too popist a holiday when she was a child
her son Angelo received stuffed animals:
a wild bird, a horse and a cat

for the journey home to America from Italy Margaret brought:
a goat

a flock of poultry
oranges
lemons
hard tack biscuits
diapers
medicines

her son Angelo was just two
the ship struck a sandbar off Fire Island
in the hurricane surf
doomed by an incompetent navigator, a hurricane
and indifferent Long Island locals
scavengers on the beach collected debris that washed up on the beach:
bolts of silk, flasks of oil, boxes of almonds and juniper berries
no one on shore dared brave the waves to save the remaining passengers

they stared at those on board who stared back across riotous waves

Margaret, her husband and Angelo their toddler
would not jump on planks to ride the surf to safety
--Angelo was too small
Margaret dared not dive overboard with him
and wouldn't entrust him to a sailor

wave slamming destroyed the ship's hull
and they perished

Margaret was 40
when she and her Roman husband and little Angelo died
in that shipwreck off Fire Island

Emerson later wrote: "She died in a happy hour for herself"