

Our Mr. Flip

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# Mr. Flip as a Sarcophagus

He is measured, carved with  
patterns of chariots and the beasts  
that drive them. There is no vessel  
more beautiful than the one which  
bears the dead. He is slammed in place  
only once. Dust settles down on top  
of him; waiting for the dust particles  
to touch down keeps him entertained.  
The bones inside him remain safe.  
He smiles, and the lid cracks an inch, a gap.

# Mr. Flip as a Suicide Note

He assumes the posture of a sheet  
of lined paper. A pen nudges him,  
spits the words which made his skin  
crawl. His father would have been proud.  
Mr. Flip will not smile, will not cry, will not  
cringe. But he closes his eyes whenever  
he prays. That trap called *hope* is sprung;  
its jaws glint whichever way he looks at it.

# Mr. Flip as a Blackbox

The trick is to stay alive. But most days, there are no choices left.

Mr. Flip is now the only survivor after the crash. A metal box of recorded frequencies. There is no lid to this box, no flaps that can open upwards. All tongue and no lips makes Mr. Flip a good mimic. If he can only stand up, if he can only shapeshift his way out of his natural boxlike configuration, then he will walk away from this carnage of smoke and twisted metal. He will wander until he will reach a town, perhaps, a roadside where he can hitch a ride home.

By sundown, Mr. Flip will have learned to ignore the noise. He will have his own feet to tread on the bones of sparrows, of roadkill grit. How they crackle like the broken finger bones of sickly girls, their unrehearsed prayers turning into sighs.

# Mr. Flip as a Clock Tower

He would have longer hands if the cold had not been so constricting. The ruins can take shape anytime soon. The invisible world is something he has seen at some point in the past. And just like everybody, he looks away from being forgotten, from being denied. Not yet a juggernaut, Mr. Flip tries to outrun his concrete pedestal and has gotten stuck instead. For twelve hours at a time, Mr. Flip tolls. Mr. Flip tolls. His sound so familiar that we remain indifferent.

# Mr. Flip as a Dollhouse

And Mr. Flip opens his mouth—  
a book of dolls with teeth—  
until he has nothing to say.

The sides of this small big box  
are built around Mr. Flip's world  
so that nothing spills out

even the things we used to say to take the words back  
even the small bitter loves that matter so much  
even the darkness, the stolen lights, the whimperings.

The loneliness catches him off-guard.  
He rehearses entering the tiny door.  
He rehearses getting out of it.

From the dollhouse balcony where  
even doll-fingers cannot wiggle in,  
Mr. Flip imagines waving goodbye

to passersby on their way to work.  
As usual, with their blue plastic eyes,  
the doll-neighbors pretend not to notice.



# Mr. Flip as a Hearing Disorder

Mr. Flip thought that it was all right to act as if he was listening, as if he understood what the Master was saying. Each time, the words combined to form a longer paragraph than the one before it, until the story simply would not end. It did not matter that the Master kept on calling him names that everybody used for their enemies. It already seemed fair that he could see, that the whole world was an epidemic of lights and that anomalies in vision snaked in whenever he looked long enough at something. The combined smell of raspberry tea and lemon-scented disinfectant was distracting enough. Under the electric lights, Mr. Flip tried to have a good time as he waited for the neon silver-green sky to open, to create a hole that would absorb all the noise.

# Mr. Flip as a Sack of Flour

The chef says *knead*, and Mr. Flip hears *need*. He feels important, like a man who gets to the finish line ahead of the others. He gurgles. He feels relaxed while he stretches, the dough under the rolling pin. Gravity is now a pinprick on each point of his body. He thinks: *so this is how we realize our limits, how far we can reach out*. He is twisted along the circumference, stuffed and sugared and slathered with butter. He wants more. He hears the opening of the oven door. The heat waves fan at him until he is browned on the outside, pale and soft on the inside.

# Mr. Flip as a Wishing Well

Can you see through the muck? The gentle plink each coin makes as it hits your gullet is supposed to be the sound of dreams coming true.

Your eyes remain submerged like the memory of a lost continent, opening and closing where the sun does not shine. How they fatten you up, you deathless juggernaut you. Open your mouth, let the splash, the digging of coin upon coin upon coin, the offerings of the frightened, the dying, the malcontent, grow their weight until they loosen your teeth and put out your breath.

# Mr. Flip as Hell

Some portrait, indeed. The edges  
of the canvas will not burn cleanly.  
Mr. Flip poses  
as sinners wait for the inevitable fall.  
Mr. Flip imagines *suffering*  
the way theologians put it.  
He smells sulfur. He hears  
the roar of motorbikes  
and the swoosh of nightbirds  
before they hit the ground.  
The pomp of Hell's ruins  
calls out to its lost flock—  
the eyeless, the once-gifted,  
the wingless.

# Mr. Flip as the Angel of Death

And what choice do they have when you pluck them free from their bodies? What were their names? What were their stories?

Smugly, you unveil your wings, those flaps of flesh and bones on the stumps on your back. How they cower underneath you, the guilt-stricken, the damned, the ones whose only enemy was time. You tell them riddles about death. They all think you were joking.

# Mr. Flip and the Elephants

On his front porch, Mr. Flip gulps beer.  
Sunset comes, and he is not surprised to  
find out that he has lived through the day.  
The birdhouse needs to be cleaned.  
The birds have been squawking their little  
songs of murder without putting away their  
beaks first. He will do it tomorrow. Tomorrow  
is always a good time for completing the chores  
which will not make him famous. He does not  
take his eyes off the elephants on his yard.  
They have never strayed away from his property  
since he bought the house. The elephants walk  
on stilts, like that famous painting, only because  
Mr. Flip wills them to. And they let him pet them.  
He, in turn, will not let anyone steal their ivory husks.

# Mr. Flip leans on the harbor rail

I hold this city in my hand. Each neon sign,  
each leering crack whore, each dead end  
will not know about its creator, will all speak  
to me in terms of what can be understood.  
This is how my city flies: an object to be displaced.  
Hybrids of yellow and gray explode on the urban sky  
while my small people walk, become  
one of the abandoned things whispering  
like tongues served on half shells,  
all curved softly, silently in the middle.

# Mr. Flip in his first grade art class

It is good to tell lies sometimes,  
even if you get caught. So he erases  
the yellow sun, replaces it with  
a smiling mouth and a mustache  
suspended midair. In any drawing,  
nothing establishes a pattern better than  
the absence of empty spaces. That is why  
he treats the sky as a bathtub hoarding  
the blues in place. He will draw the shoes  
after he has sketched the ground. He has  
not decided yet where to put the ground.



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### other publications from Scars:

**Magazines:** *Children, Churches and Daddies* (cc&d magazine), founded June 1993; *Down in the Dirt*, conceived 1994, founded 2000

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