The Elegist

Eric Pankey

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I exhumed from the muck, loam, and alluvial deposits a thousand and one fossils over the years:
Fragments of pithy grasses, chips of clam shells, snails, crustacean carapaces—segmented, broken.
Then, it seemed, the earth a kiln in which each passing and permeable moment was fired,
And fired, made fragile. Fragile yet permanent, re-sown as lime into the coal-black dirt.

Tomorrow
Or what seems like tomorrow, a child finds my skull intact, and admires the useless hinge-work of the jaw.

For the elegist, the rituals of farewell and the operatic spectacle of *exceunt* butter his bread.
He writes for the living. He writes to orient the living toward the dead.
He is a specialist, like a tailor, a ruled tape about his shoulders, his own jacket neat on the chair-back.
(How uncanny the corpse as it stands up and shows us how the elegant cloth falls.)
If asked, if needed, the elegist can measure our lengths and widths with a quick and intimate touch.

A bit of a song snags in my mind and, like a cockleburr, is hard to shake loose.
I won't quote a word of it, or hum the tune, or else you'll be stuck with it as well.
I try to work, to follow a single idea to its obvious conclusion, but the song encroaches,
Interrupts, adheres, loops, gets its hooks in, yet its refrain must be the answer
To a question I might ask, a question I should ask, once I can hear myself think.

How could I forget the previous lives—a water strider’s ease, a bluebottle on the dung,
The hollow song of the whippoorwill resonate in a mockingbird’s skull—
The exhausting dance of one step forward and three steps back?
Still, as I explain the sense of déjá vu, put it into words, what had
seemed familiar
Begins to fade like a dream one starts to tell, a dream effaced by the very logic of telling.