

Dear Poets,

Today's teaching takeaway, Jaydn DeWald's "GRID (15),"ⁱ enrolls in detective school, prose-block noir its roommate.

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How It's Put Together

DeWald's poem is inquiry's cornucopia, *what* appearing 29 times (30 counting *whatever*). Not bad for a word first encountered in Old English as *hwæt*, the *hw* inversion a worthy defamiliarization. "GRID (15)" is our safe for the cracking, each *what* a click closer to the door opening, anaphora's tumbler so tantalizing, so end-stopped by the letter *T*. A clue depot well-stocked, GRID's concealment aisle offers Venetian blinds, bloodsmoke, and black lacquer. Its wardrobe section contains a camo jacket, a "trench-coated silhouette slow-dissolving in steam," and pavement paired with five-fingered abstraction ("What about the sorrow of a blue glove dropped on a sidewalk?"). Spilled wine, "just-melting snow," and a wet shower cap cloister the aquatorium.

Two people are missing: "We can't change the fact that he's gone," "What, honestly, is she walking away from?" Are these parents associated with the speaker's lack of spy skills, never learning "how to watch [them] from staircase shadows, clutching a banister?" DeWald's opposites make a compelling case for tactility (*banister*) wedded to the intangible (*shadows*). The statement, "What I want is this: Venetian blinds, his body pinned under felled columns of moonlight," is two sides of the same demand. Those moonlight columns, an architecture you can orbit and an architecture that orbits you. Sight, smell, and sound combine into sensorial towrope amid the query—"what you've scooped up static-glitteringly out of the darkness, what with the scent of woodsmoke and the crunch of footsteps in the just-melting snow." What impresses me most about the adverb *glitteringly* is that its four syllables are a numeric reflection of the preceding "scooped up

static-” (mono-mono-iamb/alliteration). The takeaway: syllabic equilibrium highlights a dazzle algebra.

Line nine’s “spiritual whatever” cues a shift-existential, “what *is* real, anyway?” rowing to “(It is what it is.)” A platitude inside a parenthetical inside a block is like an emoji dwelling in a decoder ring subtotaling the night window’s Jedi mind till. Gained “in this gesture” are the aphorism allowances several sentences later, “*Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.*”

Wonder why DeWald’s contrasts sound blue-note technique? Perhaps it’s because the poet, a jazz bassist, once observed that the “genre ... challenges, expands, resists, and gives the slip to Western musical expectations.”ⁱⁱ His GRID plays “Dirt-cruste d fists”—their propensity a “slasher soundtrack” that “synths the air”—against the quest of place-based brass: “I will find him again, come what may, blowing his trumpet in our motel bathtub.” A synthesizer can mimic trumpet (the Moog-y “Reveille” in Paul Hardcastle’s “19” confirms itⁱⁱⁱ), robo-embouchure a choice accompaniment for “the family video projected grainily behind these words.” My favorite synth facet—remember, we’re talking cyborg piano wire—is the way it hydrogenizes harmony, an attribute matchmade for the sinister “What oozed in under the bedroom door.” Specificity, “last pill in the bottle,” is the dose toward angst (refill time) *or* relief (treatment complete). Adhering sleuthy, the former, a trio-mate of obscurity and clarity, is “What’s going on here.”

Prompt

Resolved doesn’t necessarily mean discerned. Write a prose-block that answers DeWald’s *What* with anaphoric *Why*. Include a platitude, aphorism, and one of the following instruments: ophicleide, cymbalom, flexatone, or arpeggione. In the same vein as “scooped up static-glitteringly,” how will your syllabic constructions perform dazzle algebra?

Happy Defamiliarizing,

Jon

ⁱ Originally published in Annulet: <https://annuletpoeticsjournal.com/Jaydn-DeWald-Grid-15>

ⁱⁱ Sutra Press interview

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z1oTVeW90k4>