

# Response

(long form)

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Look at all the stars! Watch them colliding,  
These stars, fighting in their secret wars.  
Before, God, before it was inviting.  
Now I'm bored.  
You don't impress me,  
And I find you slightly terrifying.

Its your wasteland.  
You have it.  
Its yours!

-“Wasteland”, Ryan Adams

# I - An Overture

Ready!

The shade of blue preferred by more of my friends  
comes to a slow conclusion. Its less frequent waves  
emerging from the doubtful end of the spectrum.  
Once I lived in that sound, with clouds and evergreens.  
Once I danced in the jawbone, with beats bouncing  
off orange canyon walls. Suddenly I found myself  
in motion, used white car, houseplants as copilots,  
well on the way to an unexpected pairing of paths.  
Once my red friend put a hideous stain on our hearts.  
But who could blame the poor fellow? His mind a fractal,  
bend within bend: poetry, philosophy, cartography.  
Yellowed with age. So escapist, yet sadly classic.

Extending, in overture, a warm welcome to the coming prism.  
The thing prefixing the thing, a map mapping itself, endlessly.  
A prediction of the depth of his love, and how it lights on me.  
Illuminating crevices that model memories of lithe youths out  
living the ultraviolet light district's advertisements for acceptance.  
A plea for some salvation for two wrongs who want so so hard  
to do right by each other. A love to make you green with envy.  
On through, past my grey view, they fly, these damn dirty birds.  
By the end they've had their trashy fill, and even without answers,  
flock together to sleep bobbing on the still, brown, bay. The fog  
cannot conceal them when so close, as metaphor cannot conceal,  
nor fancy words hide, this lengthy rebuttal to all that's gone on.

Ready?

## II - Distance Over Time

Hurtling down the road, looking out the window,  
the signpost passes too quickly to discern.  
Read me the names of the thickest lines,  
the number of the double-wide veins,  
chewing a big bag of beef jerky.

Throw the bubbler in the back with the beer.  
Buy the crown on sale, get plenty of limes.  
Keep the kind bud coming big guy,  
hands off the wheel, ready to go down hill,  
at full speed, into the possibility of a party

out in the high desert, with full freedoms,  
and the healing sound of a big bass.  
Off-roading into Zyzyx, over-cresting sand waves  
in the seemingly endless dunes of autonomy  
zones and zoos of fellow freaks flying flags.

Or just two of us climbing down from a boulder.  
Or four of us playing bocce on the beach.  
Or eight of us at Coachella with a keg.  
Or just me, hoping the car can draft down Baldy,  
even though I forgot to fill my friend's tank.

Mexico isn't so far as it seems from there.  
Las Vegas is just a nap away, up the 15.  
We can be in Utah by tomorrow if we drive  
all night and switch off, keeping ourselves  
awake, alive, listening to tapes of the Odyssey.

Sometimes the ladies join us for a change,  
as we peer pressure them to tag along,  
or they crush on a friend enough to follow  
him out to the desert, secretly snuggling  
in the back seat, next to some dude.

Meanwhile the sherbet rock of Bryce is melting,  
and we're stuck in a crater in death valley,  
with nothing to drink but the beer we put  
those limes into, inserting our thumbs then  
turning the bottle upside down to mix it.

I crawled out of that pit, heat stroke,  
overdose and alcohol closing my eyes.  
I didn't have to watch myself die, falling  
back to the baked and cracked mud floor.  
Lying there in a pit near earth's lowest spot.

No need to worry! It turned out in the end.  
Rocker Dan had my back, watching me  
wobbily climb the soft sides of the sand  
siphon, as he prepared for a daring rescue,  
racing down Mount Zion to save our lives.

Then we set up the croquet set on the side  
of the dune and, as the only party member  
not on LSD, I'm responsible for finding our  
way back to the oasis, where the maypole  
waits to celebrate a sham marriage.

Have you ever seen anything like it?  
I have. and am preparing myself to let go,  
as the drunk driver goes too fast along  
the Pacific Coast Highway, and I think  
"I am ready to die. I've had a good run."

Somehow we all live through this, we thrive  
against common sense and legal opposition.  
We break free and find something forbidden to do  
in a place where nothing is really there, unless  
we all agree it is. No doubt, it's the place to be.

Remembering who I am, walking in the sands  
along the Sea of Cortez, silent and un-tiding.  
Finally getting friendship a few years late, finally  
getting that we build it together from traveling  
through hostile environments and laughing along.

I like the friends who can sit in silence as we drive.  
Or who have a funny story to tell, a trivial factoid.  
Those I tell a secret and trust that it will be kept,  
even though I can't keep any good gossip to myself,  
about who slept with who, and what drugs are in.

We can watch the Dude on DVD again, even  
in the most sacrosanct of national park lands.  
We break the law and laugh at our paranoia that  
the park rangers care about some dopey kids,  
looking over canyons where muddy rivers merge.

It all means so much, every star seen from my  
sleeping bag, every piece of Pez i swallow.  
The steps of a hike or a stop to get breakfast.  
Including a moment to accuse the Denny's lady  
of giving us free fries due to her devilish oath.

Station wagon wanderers. dilatant pilgrims.  
We return a few more times to the sarcophagus.  
But I prefer the dry lake beds, or the oak oasis,  
or even the beaches of Orange county, access  
granted by the power of the people of California,

a golden state of near constant motion and  
perpetual potential energy. That might be what  
really drives the death Taurus. A weirdo magnet  
pulling us to wild spaces, the places with no  
rules, for only the idea of our wondering at it.

Until we pull up in front of the old dormitory,  
realizing I still have that paper to write on  
the subsistence life ways of the Morongo, prior  
to the arrival of the Europeans, with their colleges,  
and their hedonist humanist amateur adventurers.

# III - Ecotone

The sand is not as thing-less as it seems.  
Life just looks different in the desert, clinging to its crust.  
The salty floor of an ancient ocean sea, last residue of an old age,  
swimming with life, filled with microscopic reproduction and self preservation.

The drizzle always falls sideways, and moss  
grows even in the corners of the unused balcony bar-b-que.  
Droplets don't respect gravity, but low clouds feel it too much to say.  
And so everything meets, wet, in the middle. Everything grows in its midst.

My companions say they look like Lorax trees.  
In fact they are namesake, growing in an unexpected biome.  
A classic rock album. A way to track the the genealogy of Jesus Christ.  
So many symbols vie for expression, birthed by these vast, appearing wastes.

On the other hand, a massive forest of evergreens.  
The peninsula of the gods is truly inhospitable to modernity.  
A park where you could hike barefoot only to freeze in a volcanic cone.  
Jagged black behind, our skyline's obsidian view, a close forever wilderness.

It'd be so easy to drown or erode away from there.  
Sliding down the 52nd street steps into the lake,  
in hope of washing all shame away. Make it rain again!

Spin dizzy from the temples of Atuan to Capitol Hill;  
Get my blood flowing, experience of mountain ranges!  
Dueling heights coloring from the edges. Both consume me.

But the danger of the desert is you'll lose your way,  
wandering out only to never find the highway back,  
thirsting forever for the remnants of your liveliness.

The shape of the Sound is the breathing of life, cycling tides of growth and decay.  
May it never go dry!

The mountains of pthe Mojave, though, are even more than their winter night's sky.  
May their stars ever shine!

# IV - The Death of Benjamin Alden

in his basement room his head was thumping again. hiding from family, sad shaking mind filled with myths, maps, the one ring, his lord Jesus and the ashes of Shiva, other injustice and suffering. all service and teaching. always teaching everyone. discontent and disorder reign. mental electric storms shatter that downstairs bed. in there enoch was dancing, and the half giants gave him that day his daily bread. and more. much more. more and more. too much. much too much for any one man.

down there his books and posters from our parties: zappa, gza, flying guillotines. while upstairs, lights and computers, cartography and shared future of could have. when he lifted the gun which crossed his mind: their future den? or past basement? the unwed bride? his grand transferred torments? some helpless struggle to escape? fast metal meets an injurious junction. an unintended gap, silence, head held low. then there on the floor: his indelible stain. life drying under a fan in the cold.

calls went out across the nation. a new calyx for our heart passing by cell tower. the dude himself called me at my dumb day job. surprise! our brother was gone now. the next day we met over a pastry to speak of it, the unspeakable thing he'd done. he had been a communist after all, and then again, a catholic. a kind man, though. always big and red, full of love beyond charting, a killer bee at trivial pursuit, loyal, sharing and humorous, viciously smart and always cool. often an instigator.

sunday, four of us did go to the rite with them: mother, father, and brother John. all his family, gathered in the basement den, deep in the home, with warm kitchen. monday a mass is said. his deeds were praised. his sins, we pray, forgiven by god. hugging we four cried for the man we knew, who they knew too. alike and different: we knew oannes the fish man of sumer, chairman mao, easy skanking, rhymes, desert. they knew school, holidays, the bible, a church soup kitchen. together it was him.

at home photos on every surface of the man at every age render my sense pachyderm, beasts of burden. we share stories anyway. memories from mayflower and miskatonic, subaru shining. and of course he, of all people, knew where whales went in winter. frequent simpsons quoter, rap slinger, fan of purple for that cold polis. a table: flowers fill the center, foods the periphery. massive quantities of midwest meals and more: bags of chips and liters of soda, hot dish from some grieving neighbors.

on that third day, in fulfillment of our mission, we returned to our western ends. but there, too, we gathered, to bury him in the sand, and drink whiskey at sunset. we lit a fire and huddled from the wind, while playing lawn sports on ocean beach. I made a mix. more memories. wishing we'd gathered for other reasons, catching up, our old sidehall tribe, former citizens of claremont, their lovers, a few friends. he will never dance with us again. he will never take another shot. Ben is dead.

# V - Word Parades

Onward!

The holy gospel with the best parts removed.  
An editorial escape hatch for another rainy day.

“But where does that leave us, reading along?”

The late beloved are nowhere, it seems.  
But the word parades continue apace.

Still, somehow, parties go on. Still revelers strut.  
Unyielding flows of uncoordinated floats.

The elephantine events of every day don't draw the eye.  
The couldn't-care-less crowds take no notice.

Dirges describing dances with dead men.  
Explicit new loves alive to embrace.

This long form of response to living.  
To life lived with metered hands.

Paeans to my constant hunter, glistening, on high.  
Unwanted odes to passed time under-sold.

An uneven flow of words weighed down,  
by the unrelenting momentum of momentum.

A mediocre marching bands' loud cymbals,  
arranged to signify, apparently, nothing.

A waste of sound to try to say something  
about our most prized procession,  
accelerating ever on,  
to its end.

# VI - Stars of Love

Outgrown tongues and rants to fill pages.  
Obtuse references to obscene acts.  
See them all now, naked, anywhere, anytime.  
Obsessive grooming with electronic airbrushes,  
pretend sighs, and tenderloin perfection.

But he is here, imperfect and lonely,  
adoring and adorable, my young heart.  
Undercover he suffocates himself to sleep,  
the light of day shining through the seems,  
like pins dipped in diamonds, his milky way.

Their creamy skin is clear. Even zoomed in  
you can see each muscle's curve. Every  
inch of them is like a drug, a lesson in boys  
giggling, as they pretend to need each other,  
the way we do, each aching in the groin.

They kiss and the image fades away on screen.  
Its not like us. All a fake and with bad breath,  
paid to deal with a fat fuck and his demands,  
they purse their lips and out come the tips.  
But tongues barely touch, then dart back in.

The man with the muscles and star tattoos,  
obviously uncomfortable with the position  
he finds himself in, at the whim of the market.  
Less than a week's pay, and no erection  
needed, if you bend over for us to watch.

As a massive cock buries itself in his flesh,  
he accepts his place in the skies, pinkish  
above his head. The fall constellation just  
moving above the horizon to remind us  
that the world is still atilt, and next is winter.

You could say they're dancing, they're not.  
They don't know what dancing looks like:  
when I twirl him around our tiny kitchen,  
humming a made up tune as dishes burn,  
the world's most informal ballroom routine,

pair competition, championship division.  
I put my hand to my companions face,  
the whiskers tickling my palm, nuzzling  
an asterism no one else sees there.  
A demigod in the night: my heart's star.

The greeks fancy him a great hunter,  
a cruel rapist, with a club and belt.  
Three gods cumming on leather to make him.  
Blinded for his lust, healed by the sun,  
stung by a scorpion, true child of November.

Hunting for the moon, the earth hated him.  
But no single author's epic tells his tale,  
so that seductive sadistic story ends.  
Instead I see him as a dancing man,  
with waist atilt and hands raised.

Seven sisters run, but his lust gives chase,  
until a bull is sent to stop his rampage.  
He marks the end of the sailing season,  
when winter storms keep men ashore.  
His body was hot, just no personality.

Like the time he killed a lion and wore it,  
mimicking Heracles, half-brother, doppelgänger.  
Or the time we made love in the hot tub.  
I spot him through the window, obvious  
as he climbs over the neighbors' roof.

So I rush to him and bring sweet gifts.  
I make him laugh, and sit waiting for mine,  
pressing him against the wall, arched back,  
soft hard friction, coarse pounding hair,  
commanding hands holding his shoulders.

I'll inject myself into the situation again,  
state my conclusions directly, then clean up,  
and we'll just see if he agrees. He does!  
When it hits us we spasm in place, gripping  
tightly to the only other one who feels it.

Our legs interweave, old friends paying a visit  
under the comforter we share to stay warm.  
We keep our breaths aligned, but away, barely awake,  
as constellations embrace to keep each other safe,  
and stars pray to dance together again.

# VII - Silicon Valley is No Place for an Innocent Young Gull

Everyone got rich in the IPO but me.  
At least on paper. Wages are slavery  
and ownership is ecstasy, they say.  
But still the team works every day,  
diving over their cliff dates.

Not that it has become easy living,  
with endless summer and honey.  
(The opposite, as my suicide hand  
reminds me in every trying time.)  
I could care less at this point.

That was my greatest fear on page one.  
To someday awake to lightened wonder;  
find friction in my life's forward velocity;  
discover I did not care that I would cover  
less distance over time, my gun unloaded.

Asking about blank cells in Excel,  
her princess voice drones from the  
conference phone. Attend to the window!  
The bay shore leaves a nutritious muck.  
Strange to envy flocks of idiot birds.

Sad the fog of seagulls choose  
easy living at the trash heap over  
fresh food left behind by failing tides.  
But how can we say they are wrong?  
Maybe that was my mistake.

Wanting to never give up the constant  
drama of every single fucking moment  
in exchange for the easy trash buffet.  
The refuse of an entire city laid out  
like the faerie banquet before us.

Who are we to judge the choice  
the flock makes for an easier life?  
An inability in ourselves, emerging  
from an egg in an ecology chock full  
of fulfilled hopes and open skies.

Everything applies selection pressure.  
The choice is forced. Required conscripts  
accept the offered bits, or dig, here,  
in the mud, for some better nourishment.  
I thought the damage would discourage this.

But the pain of plastic is never sharp enough.  
Bits of soda can six-packs choke them,  
but still there are so many more flying in.  
The mania must still be squawking,  
“Easy reward, young ones, south of Market!”

Boredom drives all ambitious children,  
fear drives every middle manager.  
Carpooling downtown daily the two soon  
become three, joined in love, with annual goals,  
production targets for hatchlings on the Farrallon's.

What a picnic for a seal to seize upon!  
Each one's left wing full of avoidance.  
Its right wing built for bigger business.  
Nice to chomp down on with a satisfying  
crackle of immature avian wish bones.

One less gull shitting on cars crossing the  
causeway, on their way to their daily bread  
on the Redwood Shores. Querying gigs of  
amazonian emails. a statistically sad sample  
of human nature and incorporated culture.

Carpools wiping the guano away via  
rubber blades with that bluish wash fluid.  
Cleansing tears ejecting from metal monsters  
who eat each worker at home and  
spit them out in tax free parking lots.

Vomiting into their offsprings mouth is  
all they know to do. They return from the  
Recology plant and choke up leftover  
Chicken McNuggets into young gullets,  
open and eager. Fresh from the farm

by way of the golden carton, arcing  
across the curve of the earth from  
their nesting grounds to a reliable stash  
of goods and services. Whatever's left,  
after the masters have eaten.

Inequitable scraps deigned to drop,  
securities of dubious value, dangled  
for youth's willing wing and strong claw.  
Won't you help me start up my self driving life?  
Invest in me and my ideals while you can!

My pantomime of endeavor, scraped  
up from the city's biggest trash pile,  
on the far side of its southern rise.  
We can never fail again, rest assured.  
All my owners will be pleasantly surprised.

Each chick escapes these messianic warnings.  
Ignoring precedent, long tales of spoilage,  
of suffocating sludge on their beaks.  
The imminent shit-storm is of their making,  
caught in thrall again by shiny shiny.

But all I know to do is respond in kind,  
then ask forgiveness.

Ready, or not.