

Karl Plank

OPTIONS

*The choice for the wrongly convicted was stark:
transcend or die. —Ariel Levy*

upon release these are your options

ponder without end

the rumble of a door sliding shut
the vanishing act of color
time in decay, the fetor of it
how fury lasts on the palate
the intimacy of metal

think on these things

or not

somewhere a sugar maple turned in fall
without giving you a thought

and even now waits undisturbed

*

what do you know? i hear you say
presumptuous piffle

one piece in *The New Yorker*
and now there's an or-not option
on a toggle switch a choice
as if released meant unoccupied

what the body knows the body retains
wears like a tattoo inked from the inside
the membrane of memory is in the skin
and your skin ain't been inside
this zoo or tapped the sap of maples
by moonlight in vermont
that door means you can't say more

*

ok that's ventriloquism, too
ain't been inside etc.
my very critique of pretense
veers toward parody
toward a pair of odd associations
from Ariel's article
the *enlightened surrender*
necessary to survive the exoneree's
moment of transcendence
these remind me of sitting
on the low bench of seeing
through glass the branches of oak
extending finger-wings toward light
as if gravity had gone on leave (while i
breathe in and out) not thinking
of the sound a door once made
when it shut tight or the
silence of the other side
heard in my smallish room

*

too precious o poignant one

don't put me in charm's way

it's not the maple or oak
the elm with swing
not the cherry blossom
even in surge of spring
not tree or *tree* or t*r*e*e*
not metaphor god no not metonymy
not () not _____ (a blank line) empty
not x → y or why i should care
about light bright or memory
put to flight about doors *shut tight*
not a preference or reference
not a pick to help the sick
not something the few do
not what many not any *do*
who knew who knew

that *transcend* is another word for *gift*
for *given* for-*give*

*

for *live*

*

not *live* live

Published in *The McNeese Review* 55 (2018): 196-199