



**XPMK: an illuminated chapbook**

**Gene Tanta**

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by Gene Tanta

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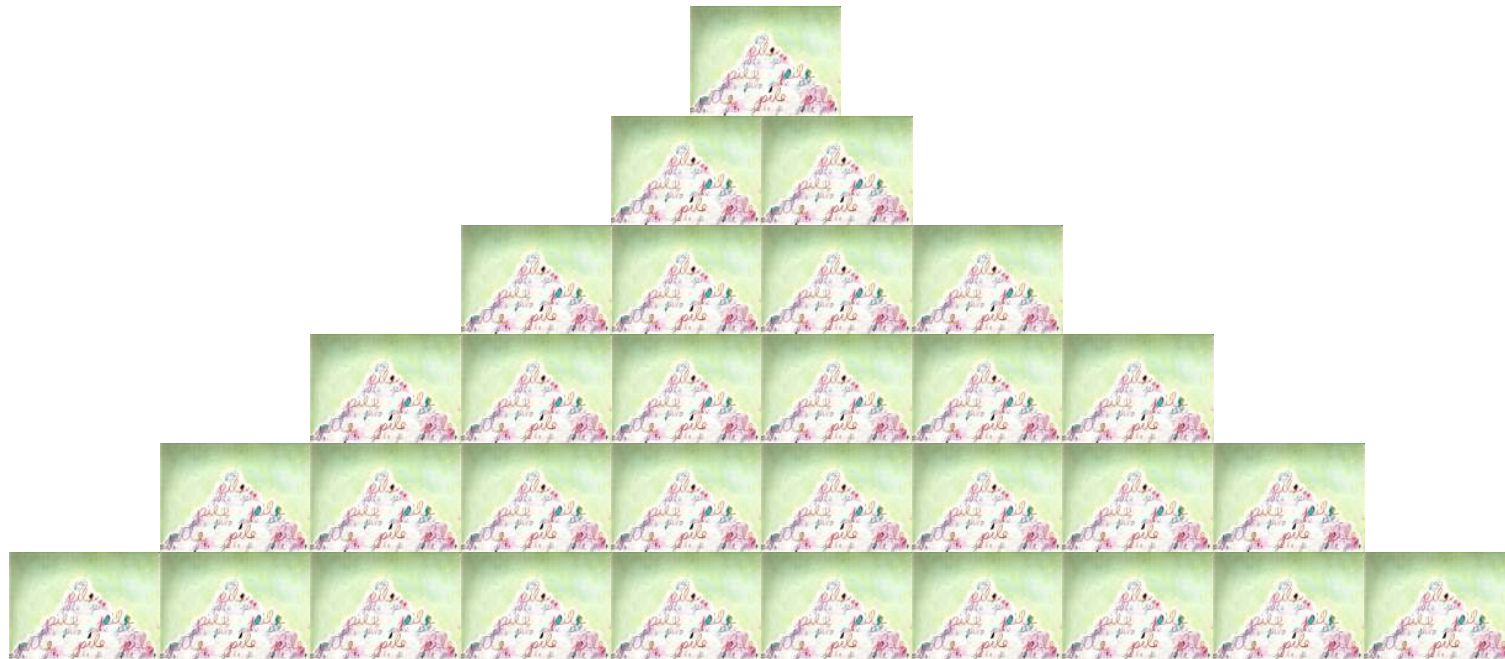
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In case it's useful, I offer a bit of context on how I came to write this book.

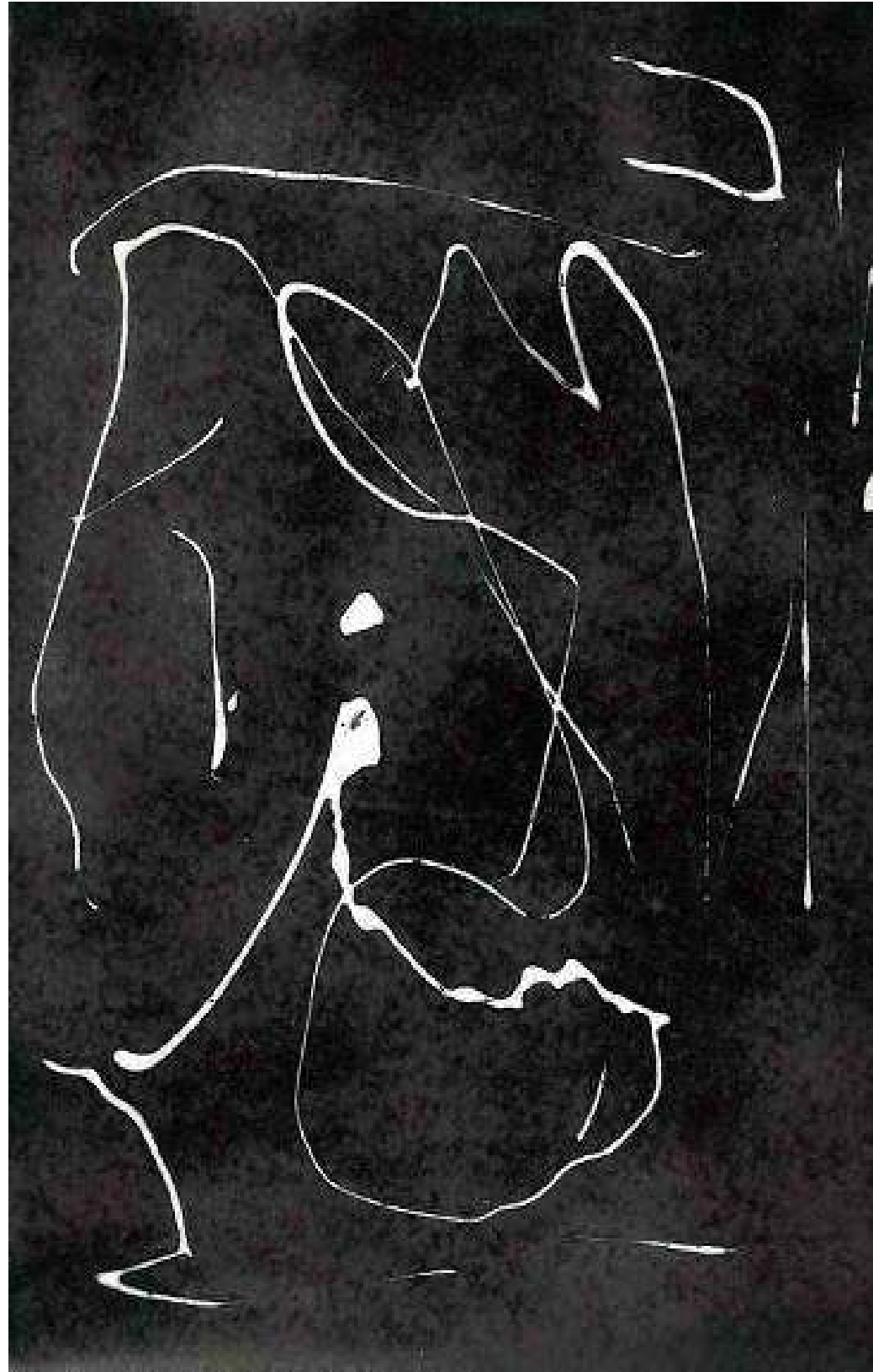
*Pastoral Emergency* is my second book of poems. The following excerpt, set to images, is a selection from *Pastoral Emergency*. I understand these and the entire book as a work in process. The full book is an abecedarian poetic sequence of 66 pages. Imposing the constraint of the abecedarian in 6-line stanzas helped me come to terms with what Harold Bloom calls the “anxiety of influence” by structuring the push and pull between sound and sense, aesthetical form and ethical content, and investigative and resolute imagery. Within each letter-section, each line of the 6-line stanzas starts and ends with that respective letter. This formal rule is bent and broken under the dictates of music: music which may clang, echo, or resonate. The abecedarian grid or scaffolding or structure helped me realize how the book wanted to be written: the form taught me that it wanted to be written at the level of melody and sound rather than at the level of sense and cohesion. It came as a huge relief in the revision process that the logic of the abecedarian form allowed me not to concern myself with how to order the various letter-poems.





X

X marked the spot on the blackboard where xenophobia poured in  
xenial as a bullwhip spine or xanthate  
printed xylographs in the X rated moonlight  
xirself perched on a xenolith  
xebec cuts the fleecy waves aft as we approach in xenon traces to  
xerox someone else's wrought iron dreams on Xmas



P

perish the thought muddy pillar to the muddy post

pins and needles pinch my flesh

pale murmurs darken my yard

parapet winds don't freak you out then plunge

plain as day passing the hat

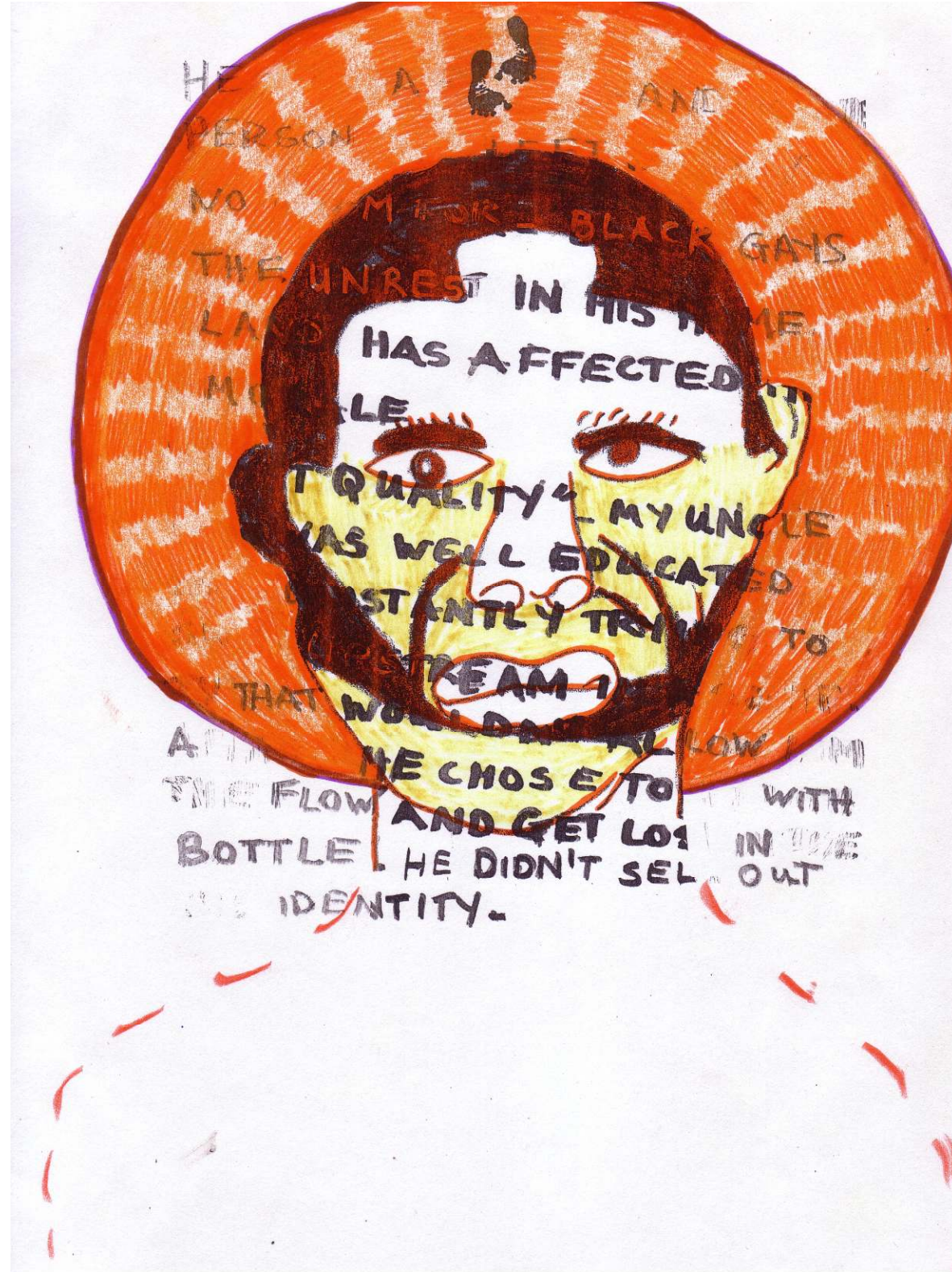
a pipedream painting every town



peak tilted this way or that in the pitch-black photography  
painting in the pig's ass on a postcard  
pellet mud and yellowed pewter  
photo-finish best expressed with a piano phrase  
but the plot is still in peril  
pin into place only one portion of the plan like Fellini



pumpkin I'm learning to love you posthumously  
perhaps perspiring a bit  
picture a pinprick  
with a pickax penetrating  
close to the ground to play it by ear pageantry dribbling  
pocket money on the good china ping



people only a tyrant knows how to feel pain  
piercing a pinhole  
basking in the patchy meltwaters of penmanship  
Pharaoh next door sitting on a piece of furniture  
paying one pinup  
in plain sight of the other pinup

another

below

another

below

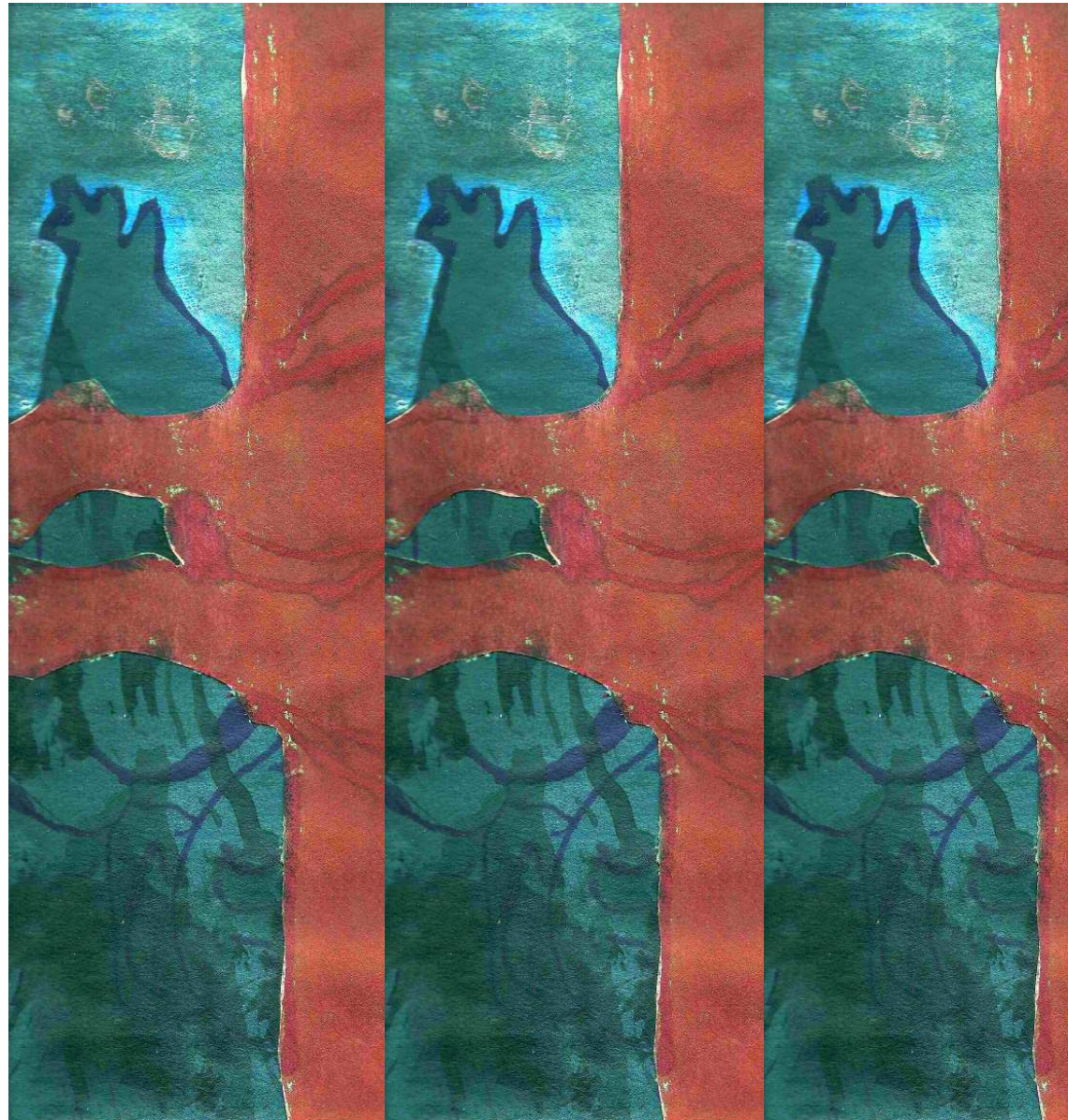
another

below

police hound on my trail asking please baby please  
a pack of wolves running in peppermint  
practically speaking no superstition is without its poetry  
potbelly peeking out the motel room door  
plural as a payback pattern  
pair off to tilt against the rivers' raw umber pelts



playing with fire pinch my feet with burning  
peppercorn sailing into pixilation  
pounding on the door get out with a fire hose nozzle phew  
possibly a pencil neck  
pulled out of a paper hat in prison  
still pissed about how bones stick out of the pews



M

majesty pitched in to furnish another bilingual medley

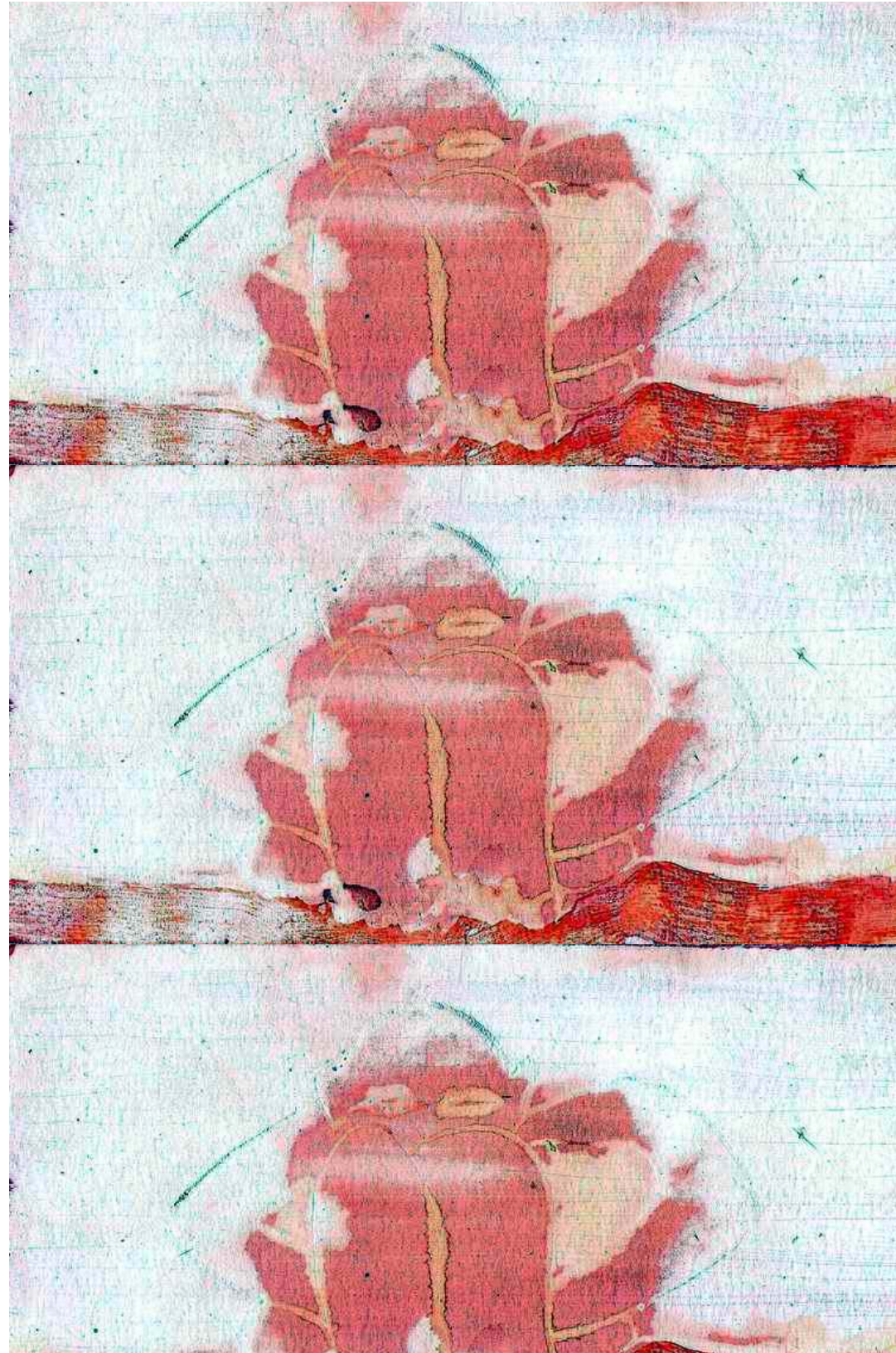
memory mirroring some sepia

muffled twang hanging off a train blowing kisses to meningitis

mouthng a mess of syllables

mostly to drop a letter in the maneuver

mute swallowing paper cranes and stifling his goodbyes mainly



lofty mountains mend your way  
make heart-promises meat  
in the meantime our horse-driver sighs a Turkish Makam to himself  
moves a glass of wine on the mat  
mules labor on the throaty shore munching on daydreams  
muzzled and missing the point



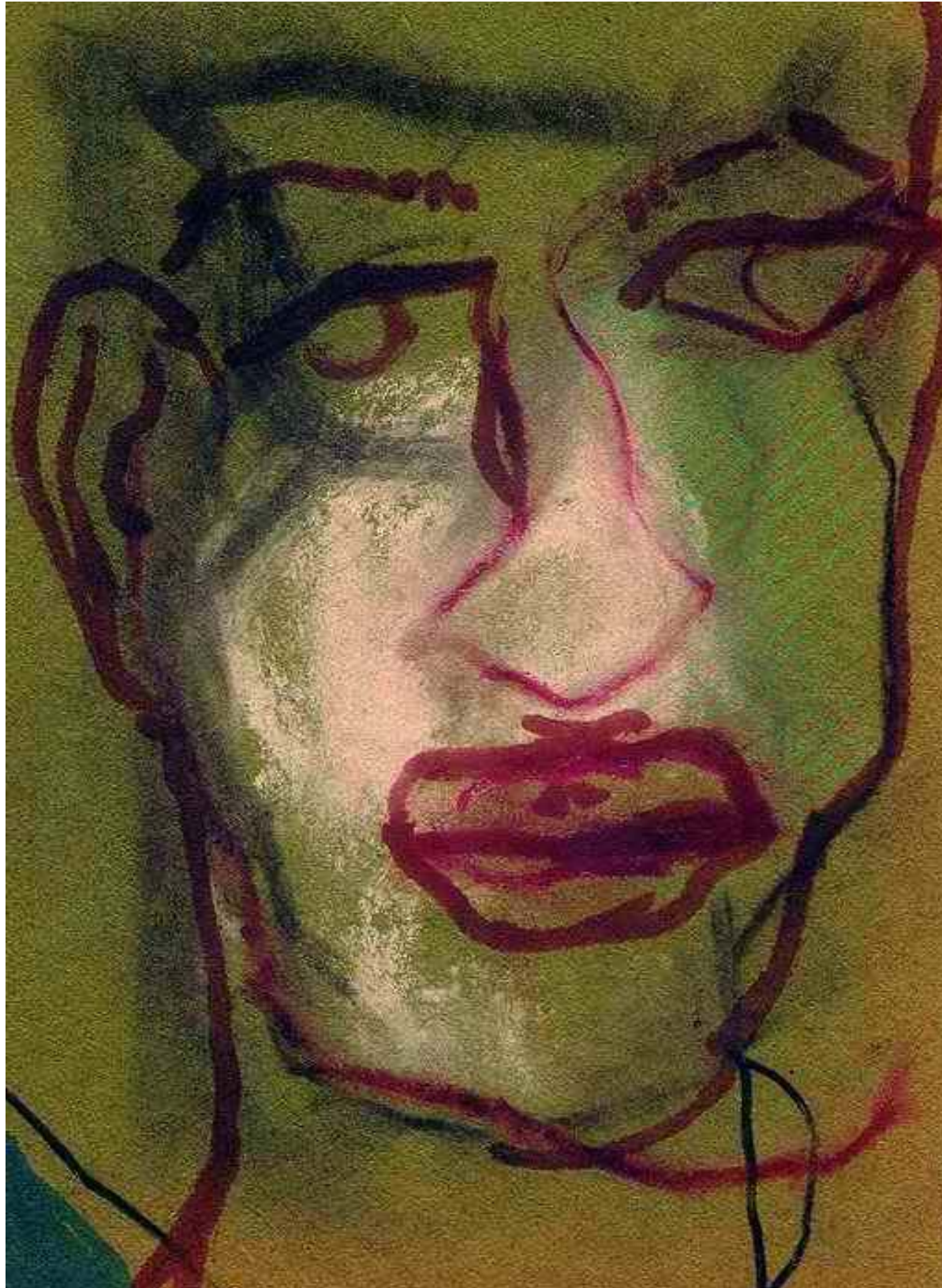
Main street madam got wind of the situation before it happened  
machine gun meddlers with their runaway good-looks  
all made of money and moving clouds  
mad as a bag of hammers the ringleader's formal neckline was mussed  
after the merrymaking and mistakes  
malted shake melting liquid low into the Mediterranean



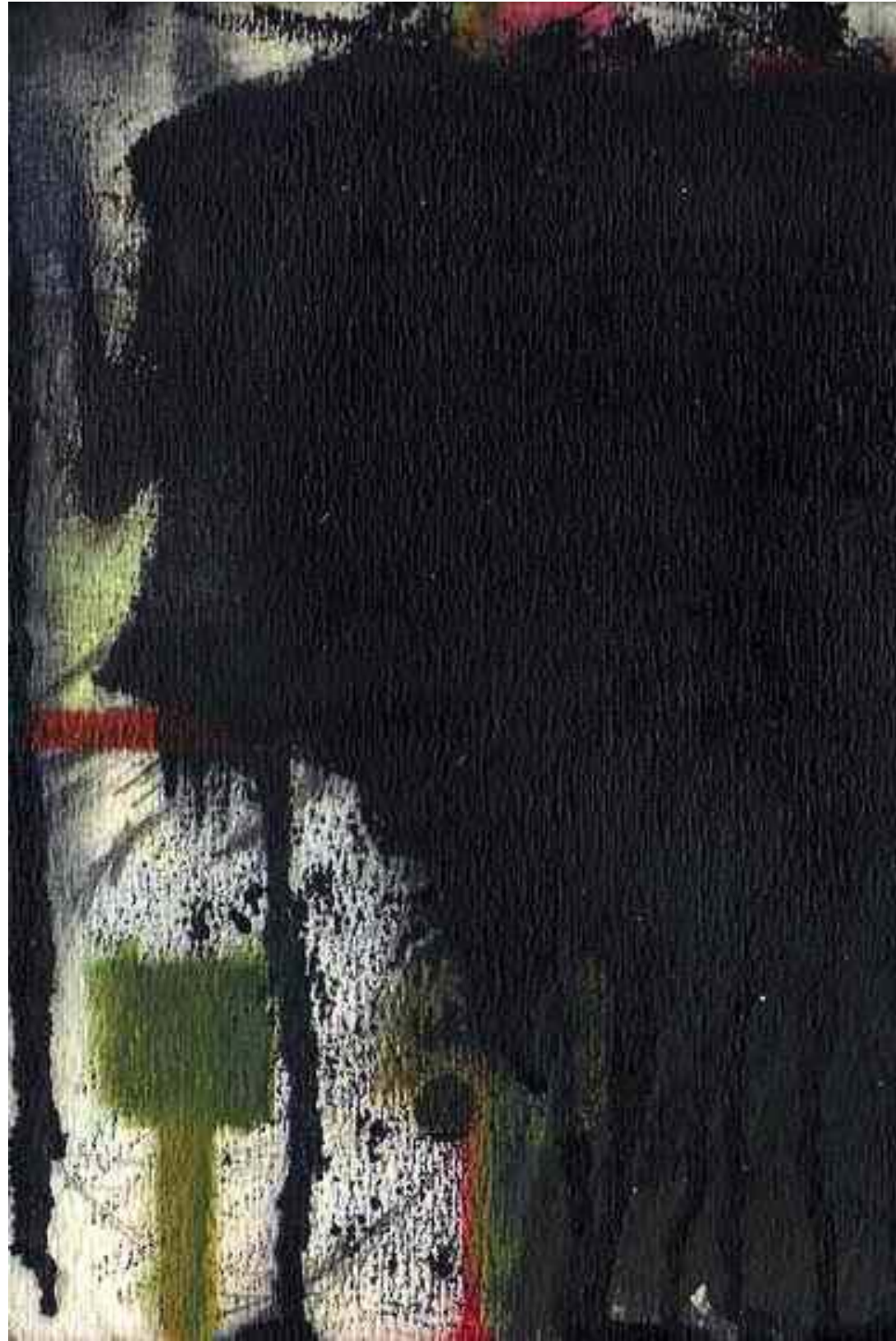
more often than not in the middle of nowhere  
man grunts meaningfully  
my steed no longer knows my name  
measures the arc of his blood against what meets the eye  
molding a message in a bottle  
most of them children made from scratch



mad as a cut viper under a slow-moving porch light  
muttering take your hips off my mind  
miffed as a wet hen in the Minors  
make your spider web to the moon and trail off  
murmuring to the mule-skinner  
mince us up a bowlful of garlic sauce in the meanwhile



met halfway in the dirty rain of the cinema of sorrow  
mash the cracked eggshell some more  
murder meant progress to Hitler Stalin and Mao  
mocked and mislaid  
in the end man makes himself at home in the metaphor of god  
and not in the metaphor of discrete mathematics



K

kissable kettle cry keep an eye on my moped

knife-edge of afternoon dirt-caked in the white-knuckle woods

knotting rope to a knothole

knock-kneed dangling his breaths

keep off the main roads sonny square knot

kerplunk off a fallen trunk



knick-knack for the keyword

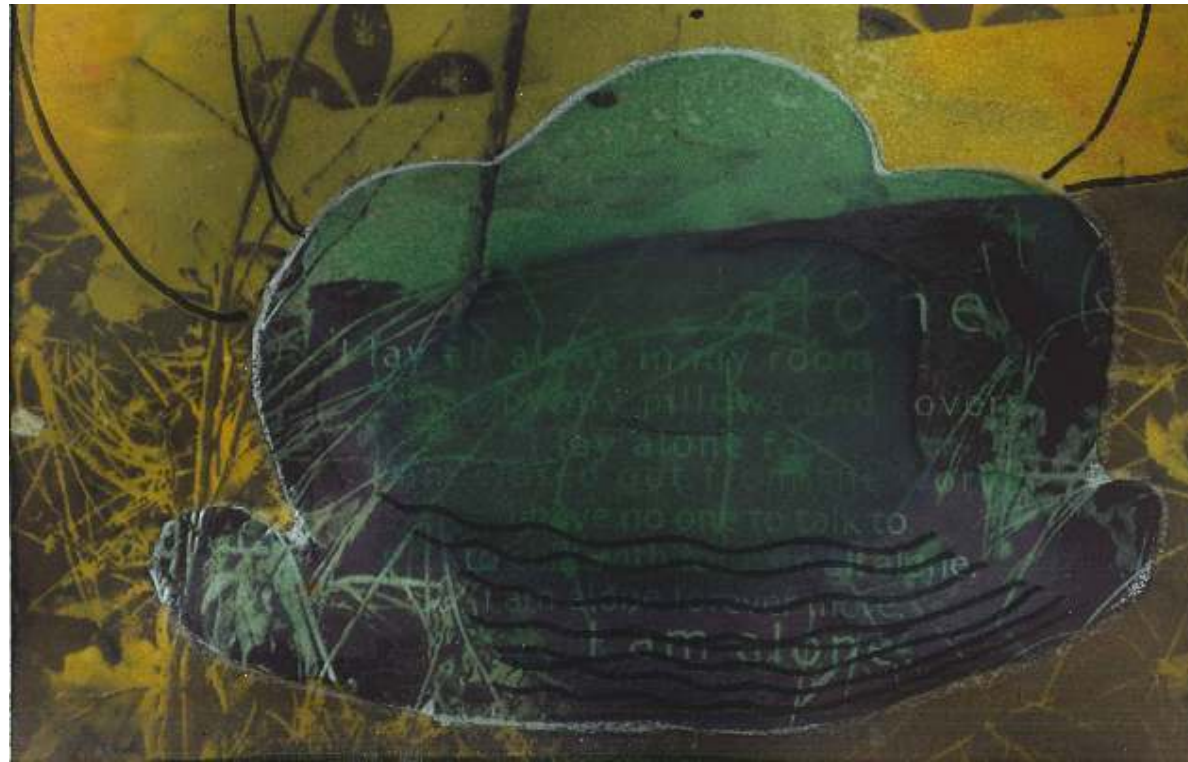
keep knifing out hoof shapes in the gummy marshland

kicking off the Turks' kingdom

knitting the tongue-tied waters into the knobs of reeds

keen to steady the pearly keys

kidney-shaped all over the velvet kenning



know the ropes my loose-loving heart still up on its knickpoint  
kitty-corner from the nodding cedar keep  
knarred together into a knitch  
you can knock-down-and-drag-out a horse to the stream keg  
but knotty scarf of thistles kludge  
killer there is more than one way to know







Gene Tanta was born in Timisoara, Romania and lived there until 1984, when his family immigrated to the United States. Since then, he has lived in DeKalb, Iowa City, New York, Oaxaca City, Iasi, Milwaukee, and Chicago. He is a poet, visual artist, and translator of contemporary Romanian poetry. His two poetry books are *Unusual Woods* and *Pastoral Emergency*. Tanta earned his MFA in Poetry from the Iowa's Writers' Workshop in 2000 and his PhD in English from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee in 2009 with literary specialization in twentieth-century American poetry and the European avant-garde. His journal publications include: *EPOCH*, *Ploughshares*, *Circumference Magazine*, *Exquisite Corpse*, *Watchword*, *Columbia Poetry Review*, and *The Laurel Review*. Currently, he teaches creative writing online for UC Berkeley Extension.