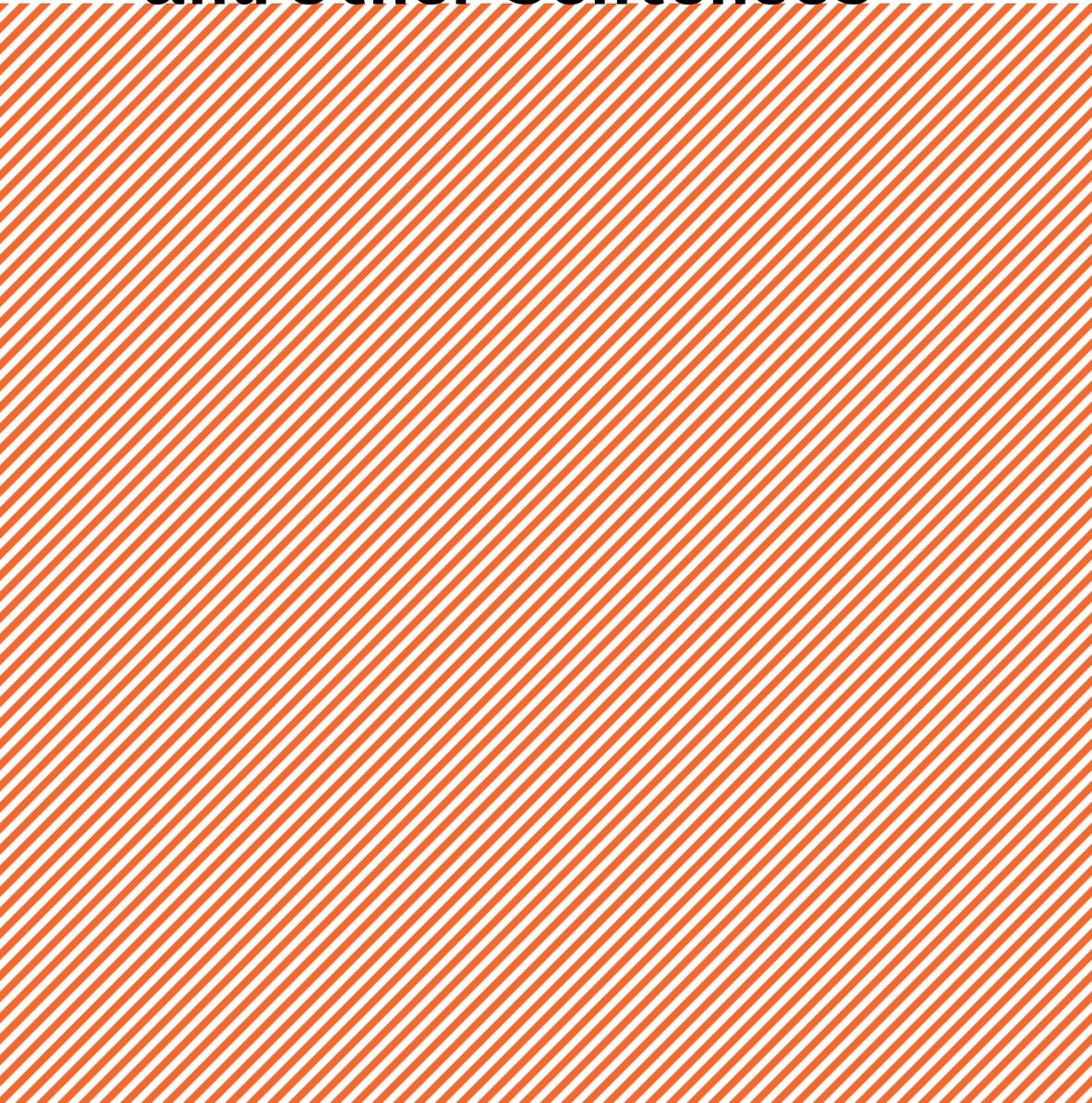


# Sentences on a Glass House and Other Sentences



1. This is the history of a woman and her glass house. It is as true an account as I can devise.

2. Better known for the glass house that bears her name and the rumor that she was the jilted lover of Mies van der Rohe, Dr. Edith B. Farnsworth was also a poet and a translator of poetry.

3. Her last work was published in 1976, a year before her death. A final proof of this book–length English translation of works by Italian poet Albino Pierro is held in her archive at the Newberry Library. Farnsworth’s strikes and edits of the text are evident in blue pen, her stuttering lines in each poem an indication of her advanced age and declining health. On the cover page the title, OCCHIELLO, is crossed through and in all capital letters NU BELLE FATTE is written—a last minute edit perhaps directed by Farnsworth, but written in a younger and stronger hand. For reasons lost in history, the title of this collection was changed from *occhiello*—the Italian word for eyelet, a small hole or perforation—to *nu belle fatte*, Lucanian dialect for the Italian *una bella storia*, a beautiful story.

4. The collection opens with this poem:

*Perhaps you want me  
and already you dream of me at night.  
I too  
begin to tremble with thirst  
and I am afraid  
I'd fling myself upon you  
and every bit of you I'd suck;  
your blood in one long gulp I'd drink  
without ever drawing breath,  
like a drunken man who latches on  
a cracked and leaking cask,  
longing to swim in the red flood,  
to drown therein.*

5. How does one make a history from this?

6. The history of the Farnsworth House, as told by historians, ignores these poems, but reads like the plot of a novel. A powerful woman—a single, wealthy Chicago–area physician—meets an internationally renowned modern architect at a dinner party, a man who has left his wife and daughters to immigrate to McCarthy–era America from his native Germany. By the time dessert is served, she has hired him to design a weekend house in rural Illinois.

7. Some of this history is drawn from her unpublished memoirs. I fill out all of the necessary forms to make an appointment with each document.

*You write about your life only if you are willing to show yourself while doing the living, she wrote.*

*set down syllable by syllable*

*whispers as real*

*as a hundred shouts*

*radical, traumatic, highly organized.*

8. The story follows that during the three-year design process, Mies and Farnsworth socialized frequently in Chicago with mutual friends and acquaintances. On weekends, they made trips to the country to survey the idyllic strip of land she had purchased in the floodplain of the Fox River just outside of Plano, Illinois, picnicking with his employees and students, mutual friends, architects visiting from other countries. She became enamored of the architect—indeed, the two are rumored by many sources to have been lovers, although there is no evidence of this in her memoirs.

9. I myself have held photographs that show them sitting together on a picnic blanket, surrounded by friends. Without a suit jacket, the architect's waistline is expansive. Sitting on the ground in a skirt, her knees are scalpel sharp.

10. "It shouldn't be this way, but I'm afraid that this story is going to end badly," a friend warns her. I mark up a Xerox form and paperclip this letter to it to remind myself of this fact.

11. The house that he promises to build her is elegant and entirely transparent and held above the ground on thin steel columns. It is unlike any other. *House Beautiful* labels it a threat to democracy. She simply complains that she has nowhere to store her belongings. He tells her this is because it is *'beinahe nichts,'* almost nothing.

12. A little known fact of their relationship is that while he was her architect, she was his physician. Stop reading for a moment. Imagine being the physician of a man who fears death.

13. "I want to know what I have to expect after death," he once demanded of her. "A man will always want to know about his hopes for immortality. He won't want to know that his fate is the same as the snowflakes on the window, the salt crystals on the dinner table."

*What story do you want?* I ask out loud in the silence of the reading room.

14. Life progresses, inevitably, toward an end. And yet, it has supernatural moments. One spring afternoon in 1950, they are joined by a British architect on a visit to the house during construction.

*The trees and meadows, as we saw them from our stone shelf, faded into a vision and in the sky there floated a blush-pink celestial body like a pale pink moon, supremely large. We stared at one another and at the big pink heavenly body and at our altered world. "You don't imagine that we might have slipped out of orbit, do you, after so many years in the same one?" suggested Mr. Dark, now quite subdued. The two horizontal planes of the unfinished building floating over the meadow were uncannily beautiful.*

15. She records this event in a matter-of-fact tone in her memoir: an unknown planet hovers so close to them that they begin to question the orbital alignment of Earth's trajectory. They find themselves in a glass house at the beginning of what seems to be an unraveling of the order of all things in the universe. A chain of events perhaps put in place by an unusual house.

16. Once the phenomenon is traced back to wildfires in Canada (an explanation that, in truth, I do not fully understand), she returns to her complaints about the house emerging from the ground. *There is already the local rumor that it is a tuberculosis sanitarium.*

17. Things fall apart in the usual way. They simply slip out of orbit.

18. She believes the architect is cheating her on the price of the house. She receives phone calls from the interns letting her know that the furniture she never requested, furniture of the architect's design, is going to be delivered. She refuses to accept it. She sends a letter to the architect's office stating that no further expenses are to be approved on the construction of the house.

19. *Perhaps, as a man, he is not the clairvoyant primitive that I thought he was, but simply colder and more cruel an individual than anybody I have ever known. Perhaps it was never a friend and a collaborator, so to speak, that he wanted, but a dupe and a victim.* These are her last words on the subject.

20. Historically, the cause of their rupture will be recorded as heartbreak. So to speak.

21. Historically, she will be recorded as ugly. "Edith was no beauty." But she was brilliant, they will admit. Indeed, she had cultivated her mental powers in order to compensate for this unfortunate appearance. (It is said.)

22. History, of course, is the process of constructing and interpreting.

23. Her first evening in the glass house unfolded like the still echo of a temple. She had just one light bulb to drown out the moon. The phone rang: "Are you down there alone in those cold meadows?" *It was an uneasy night*, she writes, with little explanation.

24. When I write this history, why do I want to dismiss the possibility that these two fucked?

25. When I read this history, why does everyone else entertain the possibility that they did?

26. I wonder if, privately, she continued to dwell on the supernatural. Not in her memoirs—in which she records her complaints about the house and the architect with needling precision, and the details of the rather boring trial in which they sued each other—but in her poetry. There are volumes and volumes of it, most of it labeled "Unidentified" in her archive, though her initials appear at the top corner of nearly every typescript. In these poems, most of them never published, she writes about space.

27. What is more supernatural than space?  
*Settle the little slide upon the moving stage  
and light the substage lamp.  
(Space is dark, windless, leafless and unblooming  
in the micro-universe,  
where incandescence is in hostage.)  
Move the precision screws, adjust the planes,  
open the shutter wide.  
(The starless infinite dark of micro-space  
breaks into sunless day,  
and now you move beside  
the radiant protoplasmic shore  
of an unknown cobalt place).*

28. --perhaps you saw all this, you too, she concludes.

29. When poets address *you*, they are (usually) addressing some amalgamation of former loves. It is unknown to whom Dr. Farnsworth refers. It could be the architect. She also kept black poodles, and was close with a man named Hugo. There was a Katherine in her 20s and a brother disowned by the family. There are many lost *yous* in a life. To move forward we must choose to suspend knowing the meaning of *you*.

30. She further confuses us by writing that, sometimes, you may become I.

31. Space is a strange word, preceded chronologically in architectural discourse by volume and void. Space is a property of the mind, Adrian Forty warns anyone who is trying to undress its ambiguities. To untangle its meaning would be to untangle some part of ourselves, some navel long since healed over. It is the apparatus through which we perceive the world.

32. Blame it on the German language. Space, raum, is material enclosure, room, and philosophical concept. By matter of fact, and without much work, Peter Collins tells us, a German speaking person understands room as a small portion of limitless space.

33. Farnsworth sought to put limbs to this limitlessness, this slipping of room into space, out of orbit.

*I looked about me*

*it seemed to me that a long hand  
would stretch out from the ceiling  
and draw me up into the dark  
like a feather snatched by the wind.*

*By morning*

*I had forgotten everything.*

34. What if their dispute wasn't sexual, but philosophical? That she kept putting limbs on his vision of the infinite—in a world of eternal life beyond salt crystals, beyond snowflakes, she was shaking her nightgown at him, asking for a drawer in which to hide it.

35. What do you do with an architect who fears death and draws floor plans from close readings of Thomas Aquinas?

36. Men who are religious—about god, or space, or the infinite or some unholy hybrid of the three (which are maybe simply one thing)—are also deeply conflicted. Everyday, they spill beyond the perimeters of their own bodies. We all do.

37. Try to hold space in your cupped hands. Close them and hold them up to the light. Peer into the navel that your thumbs have locked together to form. There, in the flesh colored light you can see space seeping out. It's alright. We can't talk about the infinite without dragging our bodies into it. And yet, it's a place (?) where bodies do not belong.

38. The infinite is a being without constraint. The architect did not talk to the doctor about God directly. Instead, he would simply pose this question: "Why tie one's hands voluntarily?"

39. "Who still feels anything of a wall, an opening?" Much is contained in a question.

40. I wonder if they weren't just looking for two different scales of the infinite—his expanding ever outward through a glass wall, toward the edge of the horizon and the limits of human perception, hers expanding ever inward through the glass lens of a microscope.

41. Constructing some relationship between the two of them is difficult. They were intimates, and as intimates the space between them was short, a shallow chasm and like all shallow chasms it contains a dearth of communication. If only thousands of miles had separated them, perhaps they'd have narrated it for us.

42. Or perhaps not.

43. And so we are given infinite possibilities.

44. We must make meaning out of things. (Thomas Aquinas, 13th century)

45. An absence of narrative is an absence of meaning. (Roland Barthes, 20th century)

46. Some days, the infinite sounded good. She could envision endless space beyond, and superhuman silences. She could hear the wind rustling among the leaves. *The infinite pervades me*, she wrote in some feverish moment that you don't read about in any books.

47. And yet, night drifts. Burning in fallen sentences.

48. And daylight is wave-like, shivering and sinuous on luminous glass walls.

49. And my reflection in the glass is poor company.

50. *The infinite finds relief*, she writes, *in a wrist's light turning: the everyday and brief event is all things*.

51. For every measure of the infinite that we can see, there is more buried behind it. A computer programmer appears on my laptop screen and suggests that the Internet you can view is like the tip of an iceberg visible above the surface of the ocean. Beneath that is most of the mass of that glacial body—the deep Internet—to which few have access.

52. When she says this I am reminded of the vanishing point in Renaissance paintings that would be concealed, often,

by a painted panel and a golden lock, because to look at the vanishing point—even the humanly constructed one—would be to try to look God squarely in the eye.

53. Wikipedia is less shy about it and offers a few helpful mind exercises to imagine the infinite—*how deep is the sky?*

54. This, of course, is just the tip of the iceberg.

55. To the doctor, *the man we see is only the man who is visible.*

56. Visibility,  
*that exceedingly small segment of the spectrum  
which lies between the ultra-violet and the infra-red.  
The rest of his being, she writes, recedes infinitely into the  
shorter  
rays of*

*his deep  
his unconscious  
his past life  
his predecessors  
longer and longer waves of seed.*

57. Perhaps there is an age at which one becomes invisible to men. Perhaps she crossed this horizon while they were working on the house. I experiment with invisibility myself by walking around my neighborhood in sweatpants on Thursdays. I do not mind receding in this way. I return to myself.

58. Even an invisible woman is visible behind glass. To a glass house, the world is endowed with eyes.

*Did the river see the house  
the house where this body lives?  
Who better than you knows  
what I want?  
The few small words which I address to you  
seek to be new, but they are ancient.*

59. Aligning these poems with the history of the house, with the possibility of some relationship between the client and the architect, is difficult to do. Poems have little incentive to be straightforward.

60. Plato believed that poetry was dangerous because it was too easy to compose without knowledge of the truth.

61. But “the true corrupting power of poetry resides in its charm,” Susan Stewart writes, “and the most dangerous

aspect of charm is that it is unthought"—just a bright instinct within us.

62. It is unknown whether Dr. Farnsworth wrote her poems during her dialogs with the architect, or after it all broke off. It is unknown whether allusions to "you" are an indication of the architect, or not, or other lovers, or not. The connection of these words to the history of the house is tenuous, though not entirely absent. It simply recedes.

63. Receding behind history is poetry. First we were mute, then we stammered sound and song. This is long before we could thread together a story.

64. In her working files of the translation of Pierro's poems, Farnsworth makes a change to "Perhaps You Want Me." Above the title of the poem was typed "Love Songs," through which she makes two strikes.

65. These are not love songs, there is no eyelet or opening to truth, this is simply a story.

66. The fourth poem in her translation of Pierro, *OCCHIELLO NUBELLA FATTE*, opens:

*Come quickly.  
You'll find no splinters of glass  
in the air  
as you run to meet me.*

67. Any love affair is a narratological construction.

68. And writing architectural history is an inexact art, a problem of evidence.

69. We could make meaning out of one of the few handwritten poems in Farnsworth's archive, this one dated two months after Mies' death. It is evidently a love poem.

It opens with

*----- you are my native tongue.  
You are the trees among  
whose leaves my eyes first opened are comforted.*

It closes with

*You are my land and sea, my language.*

70. "What wish is enacted, what desire is gratified," asks Hayden White, "by the fantasy that real events are properly represented when they can be shown to display the formal coherence of a story?"

71. Desire for fullness, continuity, causal connections.

72. If anything resists the narrative cloy of love and of history, it is poetry. Poetry is made as much of language as of the absence of language. Poetry contains space: the gaps and pauses that the narrative structure of history cannot accommodate.

73. The following words can be lifted out of one of the last unpublished poems that she translated:

*Weave, plot with your threads the stuff  
that soundly in its weft is history*

*I could have made you so, I too.*

## Attributions

Sentence #4: Albino Pierro, "Perhaps you want me," in *Nu Belle Fatte. Una Bella Storia. A Beautiful Story*, trans. Edith Farnsworth (Milano: All'Insgna del Pesce d'Oro, 1976), 43.

Sentences #7, 10, 13, 14, 16, 19, 23: Edith Farnsworth, "Memoirs," unpublished ms. in three notebooks, Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag.

Sentence #21: Franz Schulze, *Mies van der Rohe: A Critical Biography* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1985), 258.

Sentences #27, 28: Edith Farnsworth, "Arsenio," 1969, unpublished poem, Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. Excerpts.

Sentences #31, 32: References are made to the chapter "Space" in Adrian Forty, *Words and Buildings* (New York: Thames & Hudson, Inc., 2000), 256–275.

Sentence #33: Albino Pierro, "U Mamone," trans. Edith Farnsworth, unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

Sentence #38: Attributed to Mies van der Rohe.

Sentence #39: From the notebook of Mies, page 61, 62 (collection of loose pages preserved at the Mies van der Rohe Archive of the Museum of Modern Art in New York), 1927 – 1928. Excerpt appears in Fritz Neumeyer, *The Artless Word*, trans. Mark Jarzombek (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1991), 289.

Sentence #46: Giacomo Leopardi, "The Infinite," 1819, trans. Edith Farnsworth, unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

Sentence #47: Edith Farnsworth, "Night Drifts," unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

Sentence #48: Edith Farnsworth, "The Quality is Lent," unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

Sentence #50: Clemente Rebora, "The Infinite Finds Relief," trans. Edith Farnsworth, unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

Sentence #55, 56: Edith Farnsworth, "The Poet and the Leopards," in *Northwestern Triquarterly*, Fall 1960, 7. Excerpt.

Sentence #58: Pierro Metaponto, "If in Paradise You Would," trans. Edith Farnsworth, unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

Sentence #61: Susan Stewart, *Poetry and the Fate of the Senses* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 112.

Sentence #66: Albino Pierro, "Come Quickly," in *Nu Belle Fatte. Una Bella Storia. A Beautiful Story*, trans. Edith Farnsworth (Milano: All'Insgna del Pesce d'Oro, 1976), 49.

Sentence #69: Edith Farnsworth, "Arsenio," 1969, unpublished poem, Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. Excerpts.

Sentence #70: Hayden White, "The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality," *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 7, No. 1, On Narrative (Autumn, 1980), 8.

Sentence #73: Clemente Rebora, "Dispersed Days," trans. Edith Farnsworth, unpublished, no date. Farnsworth Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago, unpag. Excerpt.

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~~BOOK OF LOVE SONGS~~

~~I.~~

~~Perhaps You Want Me~~

~~Perhaps you want me  
and already you dream of me at night,  
I too  
begin to tremble with thirst  
and am afraid,  
I'd fling myself upon you  
and every bit of you I'd suck,  
your blood in one long gulp I'd drink  
without ever drawing breath,  
like a drunken man who latches on  
a cracked and leaking cask,  
longing to swim in the red flood,  
to drown therein.~~

~~Pierro  
Farnsworth~~

~~Backs to find the one he's looking for;~~  
~~A woman comes to get her shoes, and love~~  
~~A dollar on the counter. In the air,~~  
~~Mixed with the hot light from the open door,~~  
~~Romantic music hovers, sadder than love,~~  
~~Sweeter than life~~  
~~Sojourner, linger while~~  
~~Your clothes are cleaned and pressed, your heels~~  
~~are fixed;~~  
~~Open the little gate and take the bath~~  
~~Unoccupied. Dream of whatever truth~~  
~~You care to; linger a little, listen, and~~  
~~Despair.~~

The Infinite

~~Always dear to me has been~~  
~~his lonely hill, this hedge concealing~~  
~~From the eye so much of the remote horizon.~~  
~~But seated here and gazing, I envision~~  
Endless space beyond, and superhuman  
Silences and deepest quietude  
~~Here easily the heart could be dismayed. And as~~  
I hear the wind rustling among the leaves  
~~I cannot but compare that everlasting silence~~  
~~With this voice— and the infinite pervades~~  
Me, ~~and the seasons spent, the living~~  
~~and present, and the sound of it. Thus grows~~  
~~My thought in this immensity,~~  
~~And sweet to me is foundering in this sea.~~

Composed in Secanati in the spring of 1819.

~~Fenne~~ ~~p. 21, cont.~~

~~of the solar foats of the cay.~~

~~But now a great disturba~~

~~the laughing eyes~~

~~of the lad who came with me~~

~~for the joy of it.~~

~~p. 96~~

~~Here I burn my life away. Among the rare~~

~~lights of the narrow street where~~

~~now a shepherd has appeared upon a mule. May~~

~~my life ~~xxxxxxxxxx~~ among these lights burn quietly away.~~

~~p. 107~~

~~If my boy appears in the tavern,~~

~~men smile at him, surprised~~

~~by a light. But the game of cards returns~~

~~right afterwards. Uncertain and alone,~~

~~my boy remains aloof, between his adolescent hands.~~

~~p. 108~~

~~A street shone out again, high above the darkness~~

~~of the countryside, in the night wind~~

~~from the north. I stopped,~~

~~amazed at the new voice, the ancient,~~

~~blessed voice which said: "Now here is~~

~~the first passer-by, here is the best of all."~~

~~--Or is there time and a direction,  
wings and a morning,  
or only an end and a deflection,  
one night and the adorning  
rhythm of the furious drums?~~

~~The sky weighs heavy on my head;~~

I cannot lift it:

~~With shaking arms I strain to raise  
the cold, flat sky  
from off my brow, but there instead~~

~~I feel the ceiling of restraint~~

~~And sense the wheeling of the birds  
of prey. Now I recall the gray~~

~~fox hanging by the farmer's barn,~~

~~the pearl doves lying in the farmer's hay.~~

~~There are voices; what they say~~

~~is hostile to me, faces cry~~

~~their condemnation out in words~~

~~contemptuous, among the stone~~

~~clouds above my unkempt bed.~~

~~And my cry mingles, and the fire~~

V

~~You know it~~

) M

And I open my eyes  
and yet another time I see you,  
clearer than in dream.  
You've truly been with me,  
fixed  
as a stone within the mortar,  
and you have remained deeper in the heart of night  
where no wind grates upon you.  
You know  
what I have done to you,  
if now you sleep contentedly  
and do not even any longer hear  
the groans and wails of cats;  
and if at first, like ghosts,  
they called down curses on you, and shook  
the bed, and so much cold  
they let into the dark,  
now tenderly the eye is laughing,  
and all the walls have turned to air.

~~Pierre  
Farnsworth.~~

~~I VIGLIOTTE~~

~~"The Vigliotte" is a house among precipices;  
in it is a memory, the first one,  
of my father.~~

~~I reached it on foot,  
hugging the wall of clay  
so as not to fall, like a boulder  
tumbling into the gully.~~

~~I cannot say now  
why I went to visit  
that house in the heart of night.~~

~~When I entered the darkness~~

~~I felt that my father  
was waiting silently upstairs:~~

~~from a wooden staircase  
issued the red light of a candle  
which showed me a cartridge belt,  
a cap and a gun.~~

~~(over)~~

II  
You've Come ) M

You've come,  
and brought me a fine thing.

~~A bit of good luck?~~  
~~Maybe so.~~  
~~Except that in this abyss~~  
~~and who tells you it's not so?--~~  
~~my breath may not be deep enough to stay me.~~  
~~Relativity has grown too big~~  
~~among these pins of light which blind me~~  
~~and then leave me on the brink~~  
~~of the abyss.~~

~~Piero~~  
~~Farnsworth~~

E. F.

~~ARSENIO~~

~~Arzenio, you are my native tongue,  
You are the trees among  
whose leaves my eyes are comforted,~~

~~You are the plants, the cows,  
the chasms into whose rocky hands  
I fall,~~

~~the animals, the darling dogs and cats,  
the slaughtered birds and gods,  
the skies and all the other habitats;~~

you are my land and sea, my language.

~~D'Annunzio~~

~~Felicity~~

3

~~of the new almond  
is less sweet than the blooming of your cheek;  
I look at you; and your closed fingers  
are like the lavender,  
closed in clusters in the chests  
which overflow with snowy sheets;  
and the petals of the iris  
as they curve have not the grace  
with which the breeze invests  
the locks upon your temples;  
and like the kingfishers' nests,  
palpitating in the lapping brine  
with the slow and endless palpitation  
of the whole sea's anodyne,  
are your virginal breasts,  
stirred by your deep respiration.~~

You are made  
of fleeting, secret things, of silences  
and murmurs, airy  
~~and the feathery berry  
of the clematis, like  
the flosses of the silvery thistle,  
Felicity of the valiant heart,  
and now you return to me! And the Muse~~

Mario Luzi

CANTO

Where are you going on flying feet in the dry wind  
through one of those streets which have no seasons,  
behind the luminous walls of which a step,  
werev it to fall, would goad the dogs and waken  
echoes? Seen from the house

from which I watch you, where the body lives,  
movement and quiet a a disintegrating.

I invoke you for the coming night  
and for its slumber;  
you alone, who suffer, bring me succor  
in this blind crossing over from the now  
to time, in the harsh voyage from the thing

I am to what I shall become  
living a life inside of life,  
sleeping a sleep in sleep.

You, my adored, who suffer as I do,  
of whom it gives me vertigo to think  
that time, this cold  
among the stars and on the temples  
compasses birth, disease and death,  
the presence and the loss within my sky.

~~are figured by your traits and mine  
sleep and forget.~~

~~Settle the little slide upon the moving stage  
and light the substage lamp.~~

(Space is dark, windless, leafless and unblooming  
in the micro-universe,  
where incandescence is in hostage.)

~~Move the precision screws, adjust the planes,  
open the shutter wide.~~

~~(The starless infinite dark of micro-space  
breaks into sunless day,  
and now you move beside  
the radiant protoplasmic chore  
of an unknown cobalt place.)~~

~~Shift, change the dimension and advance  
until the eternal mountain of the nucleus looms up,  
dense colloid lobe of thunder-blue  
and, buried in the teeny flank,  
view the bent rod of Koch's bacillus~~

~~--perhaps you saw all this, you too,  
and recognized the little crimson crooked rod,  
the acid-fast, the lethal tubercle bacillus.~~

©my

### Night Drifts

~~Night snow, glazed and firm,  
Printed by the cryptic sequences  
Of animals and by the germ  
Of spring burning in fallen sentences.~~

~~Night drifts, by arborescent  
Fountains solved, and pooled  
Into the dark and teeming mold,  
Into torrential capillaries recrudescant.~~

~~I could wish the night  
Would last, regret the evanescent  
Drifts, Soon new-grown wings  
Will struggle toward the light  
From watery slime,~~

~~Victim and predator will swarm together  
And streams will fill with reckless spawnings.  
Ruthless growth will life defeat  
Until the last love is complete.~~

The Quality Is Lent

Ethereal images suffuse

The flowing water,

Attain a liquid version,

Watery images diffuse

Appearance bright

Of white cloud immersion,

The quality of light is lent

A wave-like incidence

--Image continuous,

Warm-brown timbered flesh is bent,

--In shadow shivering--

Dense fibers sinuous

Sky reflection interlace,

Oriole and dove

Pierce the shore-bound shade,

Silence on mirrored interface

Reflects the limpid notes,

Resounds in sun-lit glade,

Within these luminous walls,

Secluded by reflection,

Windowed by solitary calls

Rebera

From "Lyric Fragments"

V

The Infinite Finds Relief

No higher than a hand's breadth from the earth  
is the sky to day:

swollen, opaque and still, it closes in a dearth  
of air the soul in shadow.

The infinite finds relief

X in a wrist's light turning:

the everyday and brief

Y event is ~~concord~~ of all things'

*in fleeting moments;*  
~~concerning~~  
*concerning*

~~Then, sprung from unknown swarms~~

~~and niches, <sup>the</sup> gradually emerges~~

~~a sense transcending forms~~

~~observed, rejoicing in its human urges.~~

~~XENIA II~~

~~13.~~

~~I hung in my room the daguerrotype of your father.~~  
~~When he was a child: it's over a century old.~~  
~~In the absence of mine, so mixed up as it is,~~  
~~I try to reconstruct, but vainly, your pedigree.~~  
~~We are not horses, and the dates of our forebears~~  
~~are not to be found in the almanac. Those who presume~~  
~~to know them were not themselves alive,~~  
~~nor were we for them. Therefore? Still the fact remains~~  
that something happened, perhaps some trifling thing,  
which is everything.

IV  
Come Quickly ) M

Come quickly.

You'll find no more splinters of glass  
in the air

~~as you run to meet me.~~

Now ~~there are only doves' wings~~  
~~which play as they fly, sewing~~ into your eyes  
the light of my own ~~as they look at you.~~

~~gone.~~

~~These arms are mountains~~

~~shut or open wide~~

~~in the whiteness of the snow.~~

~~And if at first you were dead,~~

~~now you might sleep contentedly~~

~~and better far than the living.~~

Piero  
Farnsworth

~~Reborn~~

~~Dispersed Days, cont.~~

~~---~~  
~~Oh to become for human kind~~  
the ~~ineluctable~~ tough certainty of truth,  
weave, plot with your threads the stuff  
that soundly in its weft is history  
~~and in its pattern, God eternally:~~  
~~but as it is, purblind and indolent,~~  
~~from death to death, as ignoble shuttle flew,~~  
I could have made you so, I too.

## Review

“A woman never knows when the curtain has fallen” – this epigraph (Katherine Mansfield misquoting Oscar Wilde) neatly captures the received view of Edith Farnsworth. A pathetic and vengeful middle-aged woman, she was unable to accept that her former intimacy with the great architect was over. Dismayed at becoming an actor on the stage of her own life, she angrily and publically rejected the house he had built for her. This novelistic plot unfolds against a disturbing scenography: eternally captive in her glass cage, the central female figure is subject to the inescapable voyeurism of her neighbors and of critics (“*Are you down there alone in those cold meadows?*”). Nora Wendl is not the first to interrogate this story and its setting. While Alice T. Friedman has supplied the authoritative unpacking of the so-called “failed romance” narrative, Wendl moves beyond her to question the limitations of architectural history writing itself. Mining the contents of Farnsworth’s archive, as other scholars have done, she constructs a different kind of text. Armed with the intimate and elusive language of personal journal entries and poetry, she supplements traditional scholarship, sketching out a more complex identity for Farnsworth, not just as jilted lover, unhappy inhabitant of her famous house, but as a poet and translator of poetry. What kind of evidence do these poems provide? Like all poetry, they are resistant to logic. Their chronological time, their protagonists, and to whom they are addressed exactly (if anyone), remain unknown. At the same time the richness of their language opens them to speculation (“*What story do you want?*”). As Wendl discovers, Farnsworth’s writing dwells on Miesian themes (windows, glass, the illusion of endless space), presenting them, as he did, in celestial and supernatural terms: “*Space is dark, windless, leafless and unblooming in the micro-universe, where incandescence is in hostage.*” They probe her physical inhabitation of the glass house and its wooded setting: “*Did the river see the house – the house where this body lives?*” And they describe the conflict between the philosophical and the quotidian, the architectural and the domestic, on which her dispute with Mies turned: “*The infinite finds relief in a wrist’s light turning: the everyday and brief event is all things.*” These textual fragments are, in their own way, as terse, eloquent and oblique as those left behind by Mies himself: “*The visible is only the final step of an historical form, its fulfillment. Its true fulfillment. Then it breaks off. And a new world arises.*” Neither the architect nor his client left published autobiographies. Both used language sparingly, favoring privacy over exposure.

## Biographies

**Nora Wendl** is an assistant professor of architecture at Portland State University. She has presented, performed, and exhibited at venues ranging from Wordstock, Blue Sky, and the Center for Architecture (Portland, OR), to Seattle's Public Library and Art Museum, Westbrook Artist's Site, and the Biennale di Venezia. Wendl's writing has been featured in journals such as *Architecture and Culture*, the *Journal of Architectural Education*, *On Site: Review*, *Studies in the History of Gardens and Designed Landscapes*, and *Thresholds*. In 2015, she and photographer Rylan Steele were finalists for the Lange-Taylor Prize (Duke University Center for Documentary Studies) for their collection of poems and photographs on the pseudo-utopian town Ave Maria, FL. In 2012, she co-organized the international design competition *Pruitt Igoe Now* with Michael R. Allen (Preservation Research Office), reflections on which informed her essay "Architecture and Fiction" (306090 15, 2013). Wendl is co-editor, with Isabelle Loring Wallace, of *Contemporary Art about Architecture: A Strange Utility* (Ashgate, 2013). She also serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Architectural Education*.

**Joanna Merwood-Salisbury** is an architectural historian specializing in nineteenth and early-twentieth-century architecture and urban design in the United States. Her interests also include the history of interior design practice and pedagogies. Merwood-Salisbury has published widely on the Chicago School of architecture, including her book *Chicago 1890: The Skyscraper and the Modern City* (University of Chicago Press, 2009) and essays in *Architecture and Capitalism: 1845 to the Present* (ed. Peggy Deamer, Routledge, 2014) and *Chicagoisms: The City as Catalyst for Architectural Speculation* (ed. Alexander Eisenschmidt and Jonathan Mekinda, University of Chicago Press, 2014). Merwood-Salisbury is Book Review Editor (Americas) for the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* and a member of the editorial board of *AA Files*. Her current research focuses on Union Square in New York City as a site of civic celebrations, commemorations, and demonstrations from 1833 to the present. Her work has been supported by grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities and the Graham Foundation.

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