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Excerpts from Ghost Numbers

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Briante: Excerpts from Ghost Numbers

EXCERPT FROM *GHOST NUMBERS*

Susan Briante

—from the author: “In May 2009, I began recording the closing number for the Dow Jones Industrial Average. I’ve let those numbers randomly guide me to texts: plugging them into Project Gutenberg, Bartlett’s quotations, and various search engines, which led me to lines from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, quotations from the Bible, and many other unexpected sources. I allowed those texts to exert their influence over a series of poems much in the same way the closing number of the Dow exerts an influence over our lives.”

May 7—Dow Closes Down: 8409

a mouth without words
makes a cave,
intimacy carves
such narrow spaces,
ravine at the trail’s edge,
the distance between
these trees (8409 inches)
not found anywhere else
in the forest

the corpse sings happy
from care I’m free
an odd song, swamp
dwellers sing in intervals
toad after cricket after frog
composite song,
airplanes through the night sky
white out silence
in darkness our hands

make the next step possible,
touch sends waves,
we move through
one another's lives—
moth wing night creature
—love makes radio stations,
a night sky is a pocket-
watch face, hand in hand
we make its silver chain

May 11—Dow Closes Down: 8418

on the mountain
what looks
like mountain
lion is brother
what looks still
is a hill
of flickering
grass
a pickup truck
sounds
like a mouth
full of birds
these flowers
have teeth
but no throat
in bower and field
even friends
lay their bellies
across narrow roads
thoughts crawling

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up the back
of their legs
bloodless knives
sewn into
their upper thighs
thoughts
like an aqueduct
across the path
water turns
a wheel
to pound
a stone
until the wheel
breaks, aqueducts
clog with pine
needles, our bodies
become simpler
vessels, to begin
such a long
uncarving.

May 12—Dow Closes Up: 8469

You cannot tell me how it happened
how a soul escapes the body,

can't see the path from the top of the hill,
can't catalog this early morning bird song.

The Pacific swirls, seeds
go unsorted, unsown, inharmonious.

Today, it is best to link by reflection,
reverberation, scent or status (Basho).

A deer wades through the meadow, shivers and eats.
Your soul escaped your body,

and I was left—a mosquito at a screen door
testing mesh with the worry of a seamstress.

NOTES

"May 7—Dow Closes Down: 8409" makes oblique reference to the phrase "Happy am I from care I'm free!" (from the Opera of *La Bayadere*, Bartlett's quotation 8409). The number 8409 is an odd number, a composite number, and a deficient number.

In "May 11—Dow Closes Down: 8418," the first four lines are a play on Euripides *The Bacchae* (Project Gutenberg e-text 8418).

"May 12—Dow Closes Up: 8469" makes oblique reference to the Canadian Government's National Areas Report on Area 8469.