An aerial photograph of a coastal inlet, showing a large body of water on the right and a narrow channel leading to a sandy beach and a forested peninsula on the left. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent green filter. The text "DRIFT BODY TWO" is centered in the water area.

DRIFT  
BODY  
TWO

Drift Body Two

August 2021

C.S. Mills

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*Drift Body* is designed and bound  
by the author. Text is set in 10/15pt  
Edita Book, designed by Pilar Cano.  
It is printed on Cougar Digital  
archival paper.

Leelanau Peninsula, Michigan  
[cscottmills.com](http://cscottmills.com)

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The earth is melted  
into the sea  
by that same reckoning  
whereby the sea  
sinks into the earth.

Heraclitus, fragment 23

(This and following fragments translated  
from the Greek by Brooks Haxton.)

# A generative grammar

1

rise and walk to the point  
where two currents meet,

one from around each shore,  
to shape finite sand and stone

into infinite, continuous  
forms while the body sleeps.

wake to find them ever more  
familiar, but abidingly new.

2

2

the point speaks, plainly,  
in natural numbers:

one vertex, two currents,  
three faces, four winds.

speech plain but looping; all-  
number, all-image, ceaseless.

3

what counts but is un-  
countable? spars but

is unsparing, surfaces  
but is non-orientable?

4

rise and walk to the point  
where opposites may join.

3



The waking have one world  
in common. Sleepers  
meanwhile turn aside, each  
into a darkness of his own.

Heraclitus, fragment 95

## Harvester one: tern

at noon:

a winged figure glides and cuts across wind off the left-  
hand shore, turns and passes twice, attention down

through cold water  
passing to blindness  
beneath the waves.

to the right the chorus, vociferous from foredune, calls:

*see?*

an angel, messenger, harvester searching  
on two articulated blades shadowed to  
the tip, tip shears billowing mass

to line. spearpoint of molten basalt held hungry ahead,  
searching. scythe-wings working, tektite eyes alive.

*we see.*

beneath wave a glint of sun  
off silver side of elongated disc  
spiraling through cold water.

disc dense and keeled, tooled, silver-scaled. crest of spiral  
glints scaleshine skyward in silver signal of flesh and breath,

crescent call.

*pick me! pick me!*

sicklewing pull to parachute and hover  
holding angel overhead, stationary,  
preparing for fold to dive, when

tensegrity of bone and ligament light treading wind

transform quick  
to dart of lead.

*we. we see!*

hyperbolic plunge, startling  
plumb to water to beckoning  
scaleshine beneath; air to

water to silver disc.

angel emerge again grasping disc in split spear, shake water  
from feathers, disc a beating crescent before pumping wings.

*we.*

yes:  
one magmatic spearbill cool and fracture  
to two shadowtip wings, plumage shine in  
light and shadow; messenger is black stone

in three phases.

yes:  
two wings fold and spearpoint drop to water  
to emerge with one silver disc which is four.

chorus silent off behind dune.

0

The living, when the dead  
wood of the bow  
springs back to life, must die.

Heraclitus, fragment 66

## Harvester two: merlin

at dusk:

a dark silhouette against bright sky comes fast  
from treeline into the open. wings flick swift

and low

through

still air:

it is depth of night come to collect that  
part of day still clinging at the edge;

it is darkness come  
to light, scattering  
come to gather.

chorus, annular eyes shut, calls from slumber at the shore:

*we.*

if messenger at noon is three phases  
of black stone, here is another yet:

black moon,  
all-crescent,  
dark harvest;

*falx mirabilis*, marvelous sickle.

*we didn't.*

trim wings paddle and body come to hover,  
obsidian eye locked to gibbous light below.

wings draw taut and  
loose body toward  
that faint glow.

*we did not.*

messenger arrives in brilliant loga-  
rithmic swoop dark from above

as sickle in  
its gleaming  
drop to earth.

dodge the blade once, twice, but it comes  
each evening to collect that part still

clinging.

*we. we did it.*

and when it does, it carries the light  
scattered here in the open across tree-

line to sleep  
for an interval  
beneath that

silent gathering velvet canopy.



As souls change into water  
on their way through death,  
so water changes into earth.  
And as water springs from earth,  
so from water does the soul.

Heraclitus, fragment 68

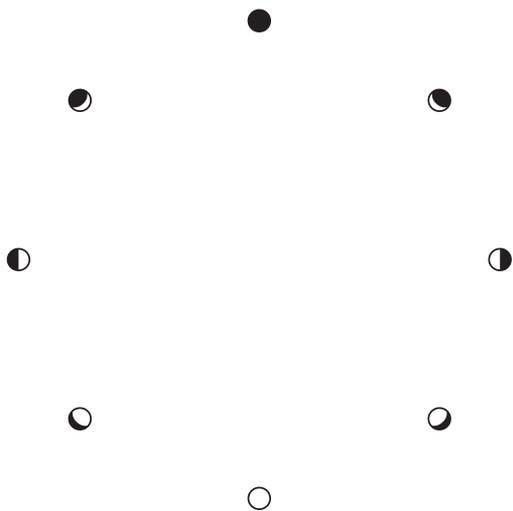
## Point phases

eye of goose new in the rushes  
wide ● shorn crescent of drift  
lit at sunset ● quartzite first

quarter in the palm letting in some  
light ● ternwing bright gibbous  
waxing tipped in black ○ thistle-

bloom full chatoyant face to sun ○  
talon of merlin the dark crescent into  
bright body ● basalt quarter warm

but withal opaque in light waning  
● crescent scaleshine glint in the  
waves ● two-circle eye ever new



wing is the art-  
iculated blade  
risen, dividing.



quartzite lets in  
some light; the  
head devours.



lit crescent in  
projection is  
a scattering.



○ where lines join  
they return; the  
talon gathers.

● basalt pebble is  
the tail devoured  
alive and warm.

● fish is the stone  
tool, *lapis*, grasp-  
ed and lifted.

## A generative flood

The foregoing poems were written between weekly trips to North Manitou Island for solo fieldwork from May to August 2021. There, I spent the daylight hours walking the margins and interior of the southernmost end of the island, in particular a wing-shaped peninsula of dunes and pannes edged by an ever-shifting sand and cobble shoreline, which I came to call Point Turnstone, after both the constant action of the waves at the shore and the small wading bird of the same name who stops there during spring and autumn migration.

My fieldwork consisted of watching and collecting data on the population of Great Lakes piping plovers who breed and nest at the point, which this year comprised fourteen pairs plus one at another point just to the west. For most of the season, the work had me on the beach watching the birds from sunrise to dinnertime, so I became quite familiar with the movements and habits of both the birds and the margins of the point itself, which shifted sometimes drastically day to day. The birds' behavior, on the other hand, changed more slowly, running its course over the season from territory establishment and pairing-up to incubation, brooding, fledging and the eventual high-summer departure south. Between dinnertime and sunrise these movements and habits continued mirror-wise in my imagination and dreams.

Images at the point arrive bluntly, having a certain inexorable, ever-renewed inertia expressed most clearly by the waves and swell rolling in from open water. They arrive night and day alike and reshape the land into new forms—replenish it through reconfiguration—just as the unconscious replenishes consciousness with images in both waking and sleep.

Indeed, the images arrive at both shores in an unconstrained flux of number and form, sometimes cloaked in language and sometimes not; a generative recombinatory flood that here appears linear, there looping and fractal, but anyway ceaseless. On the beach at noon I might glance up from my notebook to see the whole of it cryptic in the startling plunge of caspian tern to cold water, in the writhing of shiner lifted from the surface, its two-circle eye wide to the sky. After dark, in dream, it might return guised as a circular pool of clear water rimmed by a clay cliff rising to a precipitous, undercut bluff. Such is the tricky nature of the flux. These poems are an attempt to faithfully follow its images for a ways; two hands dipped into the stream and brought to the mouth.

Now, here at the beginning of August, the plovers have mostly departed south and my work on the island is done for the season. This interval, like the one between evening and sunrise, can allow the images from the point to circulate mirror-wise for a time until I return in the spring. The opportunities offered by light waning to darkness are rich, and we forego them at risk of starving.

## Sources

Heraclitus. *Fragments*. Translated by Brooks Haxton. Penguin Classics, 2003.

## Acknowledgements

Thanks to the University of Minnesota and the National Park Service for the opportunity to work for the summer on North Manitou, and for allowing part of that island to remain a refuge for so many species and processes, even at the otherwise inescapable height of tourism season. Thanks to the plovers for immersing me in your melodious language; I have a lot to learn.

The land on which all this happens is the home of Anishinaabe peoples, and I thank and recognize the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. I acknowledge the tension (not to say absurdity) of the United States government working to restore ecosystems on stolen, parceled, logged and occupied land. Theft can only begin to be compensated by a return—no less. I hope we, as settlers, can begin talking about what that means.

And finally, many thanks to you readers, who reciprocate with your support and attention the work I do making poems. It would be much less fun without you.

To subscribe, visit [cscottmills.com/zine](http://cscottmills.com/zine). Happy August!

a generative  
recombinatory  
flood