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A Birdhouse at the Bottom of the Ocean

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A Birdhouse at the Bottom of the Ocean

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
University of New Orleans
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
English

by

Sarah Carole Howze

B.A. English Harriet L. Wilkes Honors College, 2004

May, 2013

*for Carolyn
and
my mother*

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INTRODUCTION

“I am awake only in what I love and desire to the point of terror,” wrote poet activist and leftist philosopher Hakim Bey. I crave that moment—that point of terror. I try to find it in all of my poetry. I want to collect series of instances, both fantastic and banal, in which a mash-up of situational and emotional electricity occurs: evening heat lightning over a storm-destroyed coast, a conversation with my ex-lover who has become a moth, the panic of being home alone during a blackout. I, then, rearrange these collages, instances, and sensations to create a work that distills the moment. I strive to create a sense of helplessness in my reader. That is not to say that all of my poems are edgy or dangerous, but I do want my readers to engage with their own shadowy “crawl spaces.” As they explore what disturbs them in my poetry, perhaps they will move through those darker emotions and discover a better understanding of their own fear and sadness. *A Birdhouse at the Bottom of the Ocean* is the result of my continued effort move through the panic. Sometimes I address those fears head on, and sometimes I hide behind the mask of the scared, smartass young woman I left back in Vancleave, MS.

I remember reading Angela Jackson, Adrienne Rich, and Marge Piercy when I was about thirteen and getting really excited that there were female poets that provoked and inspired me. That same year I discovered Alan Ginsberg, Gary Corso, and William Burroughs. These writers, and the many more that followed were my mental train ride out of the sleepy Mississippi town where I grew up. My convoluted and, ultimately, co-dependent relationships with the characters in many of my poems represent the complicated feelings I have about much of my Southern upbringing. Dr. Elizabeth Steeby asked me how I saw myself in relation to the race/class relations in Southern Mississippi, and I realized that the sheltered girl who can't see her own shortcomings still lives in many of my poems. The love/hate relationship I have with my

environment plays a large role in this poetry. The speaker's relationship to her external environment lends to her sense of smallness or powerlessness. The natural world becomes a vehicle for the female body, a scene of chaos and destruction, and a "Dali-esque" depiction of marine life.

The section "Fort Bayou Road" explores the "its-not-me-its you" relationship with my family and childhood home. Poems such as "Not Natasha," and "All Along An Injured Coast" address the frustration and loss I felt during the wake of Hurricane Katrina. The poems "C.L. is in a bed at Keesler Memorial" and "Dad's Boats" address my inability relate to some of the people and places from my youth. Poets such as Nikki Giovanni and Natasha Trethewey, who write vividly about the South and its grotesque beauty, inspired me to work on my *home* poems.

During my time as a graduate student at the University of New Orleans, I developed a healthy enthusiasm for contemporary cultural studies, as well as literature's (especially poetry's) impact on both American and global cultures. While I appreciate all forms of poetry, I am drawn to contemporary writers, especially queer, multi-ethnic, or female writers. My attraction to writers who identify as *queer* or *other* lies in the way they deal with the multifarious nature of identity and self-categorization. Although, I do not personally identify as queer in terms of sexual preference, I do believe strongly that the ideology of queer discourse is crucial for implementing social change and overthrowing exclusive hegemonic structures. By accepting queer politics as a stance that refuses to accept heteronormative dialogues, many people who are not LGBTQ can relate to and support the socio-cultural impacts of queer/gender/cultural studies.

Recently, I read Tamiko Beyer's poetry and her ontological perspectives. Barbara Jane Reyes' one- page review of *queer::eco::poetics*' fundamental properties reminds that *queer* "is not comfortable . . . is delicious . . . disrupts . . . saturates . . . is hot, is erotic . . . decolonizes . . .

explodes . . . blurs . . . is always political . . . slips away . . . and manifests itself elsewhere”

(Doveglion Press Web). Beyer’s blending of queer identity politics into *eco::poetics* informs how language constructs world/body politics. She creates an acute summation of a constantly shifting dialogue and provides a safe discursive sphere in which to analyze an infernally slippery mode of discourse. I take from this philosophy the ability to destabilize and subvert power and try to work it in to my writing.

The queer elements in “I-10 West” evolve out of the impossibly nebulous nature of terror. Every time I think I have named what scares or hurts me, the emotion shifts, changes direction, or takes on a new identity. The anxiety in these poems does not lie in a sense of *not belonging*. It stems from an inability to process or accept situations. In short, the sense of apprehension and disquietude arises from my fear of sudden change and my incapacity to control that change. In “Sea Change,” I worked to create a sense of *going overboard*. Poems such as “Lottery of Moths” deal with a desire to save living things/relationships that are beyond saving.

Kay Murphy points out, and I share this sentiment, that a hypersensitive speaker who is unable to save the lives of other living creatures emerges as an over-arching them in this collection. She writes in her notes, “Call me Jungian, but I believe the helpless creatures [of this world] are extensions of the self, that part of the self that feels helpless . . . The poem[s are] a kind of apocalyptic vision . . .” (Murphy Notes). I hope a sense of empathy and connection breeds interaction with the poems. The intentionally abstruse nature of certain poems yields lyric tension that the reader may push up against and struggle with. This process may work for or against me. In “Snapfrost” and “Nest Diorama” the speaker attempts to save living things but she cannot complete the task. Conversely, the poems “Pelagic (Missed Connection)” and “Sea Change” involve the speaker feeling so powerless that she loses her sense of humanity.

Internalizing much of the harsh criticism I heard as a child led me to relate to poetry in which the speaker is in a tractable or incapacitated state. Daniel Khalastchi's book *Manoleria*, and his poem "Insufficient Funds," inspired much of this collection of poems. Here, the speaker describes a series of events that eventually lead him to a mysterious door. In the third segment of the poem he writes:

Without light, the slope down is
deceiving. There doesn't feel to be a
railing so I focus my weight as I step and
descend. By the time I get to the second
landing, it's clear I am walking on horses (15-9).

The phrase *it's clear I am walking on horses* brings to light a realization that the situation is not what it seems, and more importantly that the circumstances are out of his control. The implied or underlying lack of circumstantial control yields a sense of vulnerability for the speaker. The moments of external and internal tension move against one another.

My speaker navigates the obstacles of each poem in a different manner demonstrating ways in which the *self* can be compromised. While anxiety may be a subtext in many of the works, the primary focus lies in how my speaker reacts to her environment. Often in the midst of my panic attacks, my current situation becomes very surreal to me—a cafeteria can become impossible to navigate, holding a pen is a task requiring my utmost focus. In this thesis and throughout my career, I explore the rooms we are told never to go into as children—to sit with what *is not okay* and find a kind of solace or redemption within that space.

On a structural level, I try very hard to *listen to what the poem is saying* and structure the poem around these cues. Rarely does this happen for me right away, or as I'm writing. Often my

poems go through several shapes as I shift lineation or reconfigure the structure of the poems to build momentum. I recently read poet Kristin Sanders chapbook *Orthorexia*. Her ability to build a poem that is *light* and *airy* on the page, but also uncomfortably dark struck a chord with me. Her poem titled “[Notes]” following the poem “Landscape” has only five lines and is spaced to occupy the whole page. I understood “[Notes]” to work as either a separate poem or as the endnotes to the poem “Landscape.” In any case, the last two lines on page 27 are coupled and sit at the bottom of the page: Burn. Scar. Shiver.

Speak.Speak.Speak (4-5).

These lines read to me like a simultaneous command and plea for help (5). I have tried to emulate her technique in some of my poems with varied degrees of success.

By saying too much or very little, I wrote this collection of poetry as a reflection of the loss and unease I believe many people currently feel. All of these poems involved a process that allowed me to delve into both the external/internal ways emotional and physical distress manifests itself. By taking the corners hard and fast then skidding in slow motion towards the walls we must all hit, I discovered moments of peace in the chaos.

Fort Bayou Road

All along an injured coast

for Paul Simon and Marianne Moore

Like hermit crabs with tin can shells,
we have moved back with what we can carry.
The oak trees are sprouting leaves
after months of indecent
exposure. Summer sun of shade, salted heat.

The puddles resemble small lakes,
and piles of debris resembling small lives
have reduced themselves considerably.
Mostly now there is space.

Simon singing from my battered laptop
This is a lonely-lone, lonely life
Sorrows everywhere you turn.
Sicker than normal.

The air is thick with unspoken agreements;
negotiating dignity stings with the
clouds of mosquitoes. We cut deals
with marsh mud and driftwood
just to stay in this place,
Mississippi's man-made beach.

C.L. is in a bed at Keesler Memorial

Kimberly is here in a pink dress.
Pretty as a switchblade and distant
as that high yellow moon.
Mom couldn't make it.
Tuesday afternoon—
feels like it's always Tuesday—
If you were me, you'd yell at you
the way you wheeze through
those milky white tubes.
Everybody looks dead
under fluorescent lights. Weak,
the way Kim just forgot me
then five years later wants to
hold my hand and say silly prayers.
Your purply fingers
I might find in a frozen food aisle.
Whiskey was your favorite
if memory serves.
See? We are alike, but
I wear my mean on the inside.
You got a whole tree root
inside you. The black glows
a white screen—maps the dying.
The morphine pale
drops like your fuzzy fucked up eyes.
You go off, I squeeze your hands.
Elevator doors swallow me whole.
Death be not
Be not proud.
*Brother, down here, pride is the last thing
on anyone's mind.* I squint
in the crayon sun. I start up my blue sedan.
Tap the dashboard to Sam Cooke—
you would have hated it—what with all that
Negro singin'. I hum the melody
down HW 90.
These arms of mine.

Birds Is Sleeping
After Adrienne Rich

I say *you*, but you know
I mean *me* when I say *you*.

You think, or you think you think
You got what you came for

The wreck and not the story of the wreck.
It starts to get dark earlier than expected.

Daytime of things you'd rather not.
Don't tell any one.

Pity is a fish tank;
clouds could.

Slingshot clouds blown reckless
burst to see what they left behind:

a shadow of a doubt. The doubt hurries off,
to catch things that are—like clouds.

Here, you point to where you know
you should say something about birds,

nests, and winter migration patterns.
However, the thing that eats you

every day does not sleep.
Drive home,

check every corner, every dark house.

Dad's Boats

I watch you with your boats and your wires
mending tiny dials, exhaust risers, gaskets —
all the world's a clock to you,
something to be adjusted, navigated,
narrated, sailed. You document distance,
outcome, result; track currents and tides.
The cormorants perch heavy on the wire
over Back Bay. The evening settles in
this scenario as you adjust and readjust
coils of ropes, cans of gas, various tackle.
You stand swearing below the house; this, too,
is expected. God bless you and your engineer
heart. Your wife has trailed off to bed.
I take note of two baby gators born
last Spring as they emerge from Spartina grass
and circle the dock, amateurs
at low tide navigation. Frogs and cicadas
in for the evening hymnal: you continue swearing
and adjusting (I don't say *fix*. Not sure
if anything was broken in the first place).
You are there all night with boat motors, generators,
water pumps and Coast-Guard-issue-radios
sending signals across dark water.
Far as I can tell, the fact that your daughters
cannot be mechanically reassembled has always
eaten at you. My eyes slip the horizon.
I pour a Captain and Diet. Lose myself
to the sound of shrimp boats
coming home with empty nets.

Self-Reliance

Cold thunder rumble. A barge. Moans in the crooked arm of the river. Tangle of branches. Winter fog in the half-light of five thirty. Long fingers press into wet dark. It is a bumpy ride to where all things end up and not quite time to head into work. Rain blind wrapper of bayou fog—so the story reads. Ted Hughes’ “Red” or perhaps “Daffodils” clicks in the memory banks. What it means to remove a life. A picked flower. It’s a tough read. A rabbit in the mouth of a mongrel. To say, *what to say*. The answer? Somewhere lofted in the overhead lighting. A clock comes on a slow unwind. At the bar the filaments of dust clinging to forty-year-old ceiling fans gossip. Lights come up to their whispers. It goes something like this: *Yeah, yeah she was just fourteen. Of course the family had money. The suspects are cyber-bullying and a bed sheet. What does that even mean? Oh, the service? It’s next Sunday.* A week ago, Amelia died in neonatal ICU (and the name is important here because it makes it real). Outside the cab honks. It honks three times.

The Nautilus and Me

haze of well liquor static cling
captive to a wracking cough
personal inability to accept loss
cannot help

but to press
a bleached exoskeleton
of a face yours
firmly against soft spots in my skull

push hard
enough bones crack
to hear the ocean
your voice in waves
comes back

it is an echo
which is a ripple inside
of a shell that is
a nautilus
 that is you

Fish Pantoum

The rusty faucets gush dust
I see fish flip flop among filth and floor
Bending baseboards stretch me to sink
Dusty gold mouths mouthing *more*

The fish flip flopping on a filthy floor
I stoop to scoop into sweaty palms
Dusty gold mouths gasping *more more*
Water don't flow in this fish and dust

I stoop to scoop with my sweaty palms
Sweat's not enough for fish to survive
Water don't flow for us fish and dust
Wet mouth mouths *I'll keep you alive*

Sweating the thought of fishes survive
Swallowed flip floppy bodies one by one
Wet mouth mouthed *Come in to live*
One by one the dusty fishes came

I have had their bodies one by one
Full belly of flip flop meaning
Into my all the dusty fish come
Flippant fins make hard to swallow

My belly full of flip flop meaning
Hard words were fish to swallow

Not Natasha

Mikee's house on First Street. A little blue single shotgun smashed by a giant's foot. Smashed by St. Michael and his Catholic church—an enormous shell of a church. Back there, back about seven years ago. I, in flight, waited for what would be memory. Granddaddy's farm in Vancleave. How his pantry smelled. Government food from the BX. The pot bellied stove on winter nights. How to catch and clean a catfish. The taste of scuppernong wine when no one was watching. Mam-Maw was a fierce kind of beauty. I walked barefoot on immaculate pea gravel drive between pecan trees. Lady, their three-legged Catahoula. Pony Club. Girls with nicer horses. What I lost before the condos and casinos. *All the islands I knew by heart* *(see also, the heartbreak of memory): Cat, Petit Bois, Horn, Ship. But what really got me, were crippled live oaks from Front Beach to the Pass. Mostly because I couldn't talk about the funeral homes with freezer trucks of bodies in the parking lots. Even now, no one wants to talk about the prayers spraypainted on the buildings in Back Bay. Prayers in broken English and Vietnamese. My friend Binh makes movies. He has those pictures hanging on his wall. The translations bring tears. That cannot be published.

Nativity Scene

ruched too tight
stutter step readjust
heart burn be boiled
over the cheek red
wine blush bleach
under finger nails

and wait—the day's
not done No! found out
out again has she
a Little little smileface
because the real is just
too too you know

tug bun begin the again
remember when did
eyes paint dark crows
call to finish dishes
reconciliation reflect
the glass and know you

can't hug a mountain range
(hush now—to you)
peaks and valleys adjust
the bra pinches while
scrubbing furious all
humming rockabye

The Outsiders

There was a bed riverbed,
the summer a too thin summer.

A Buddha print sarong wrapped
around a hip-bone jut. Braids fell
reckless over breasts.

Two feet of slow moving water
drug the insomniac afternoons from 2-4.

Beer cans bobbed in the Styrofoam
aluminum idiots. The rebellion,
if it was even that, lazy and too late.

The theatre was a church off of Lee St;
it was still a church to most of us.

My trip to New York
left a permanent crease in how
we all talked to one another.

Houseflies buzzed
the day's dried up conversations.

The only way to survive
the outcome of all possible equations
was to divide X (college acceptance letters)
into Y(the expense of a divorce).

Then, factor those outcomes into

every which way someone can learn like a plant
to face East or West.

Dauphine and Montegut St.

A Lottery of Moths

I know I say things. Better than they are. I cried. The stalled truck on Back Bay's beach. We stalled. We drank warm beer. The gulls raced to the sun without moving their wings. Now is not then. Lightning has lost. Olive oil stains cloths in the kitchen. No sense of mystery. The clock crawls from three to four. Progress with the bait in its mouth. A fish. My pecan-cruste salmon. The sauce dream that keeps coming back. I try. I talk to you—but you are a green ripple. Huge and spiny. Foreshadow: Polyphemus or Prometheus, Luna, Atlas, Hawk, White Witch. How to tell you? I don't. This is not a good sign. When you will be beautiful and winged. Three days. A mate, you fuck then die. Small sets of eyes blank. Slow horrible jaw moves over a leaf. Understand.

Retainer

It was fuzzy, all the yelling back and forth
I tried to use my blanket to separate them once.
I sucked my thumb till I was six.

Fast forward to four years later,
I got a retainer that made my mouth
look like a bear trap, forcing my jaw
to clench down constantly.

Now, I have a square face,
According to *Vogue* beauty editors.
Jaws that feel as though they could
crack walnuts with no problem.

I still grind my jaw on bad nights and
wake up with a searing migraine.
I'd like to think none of this is my fault—lie.

Neo Cosmopolitan Reader For Young Ladies

Today is a quick cure for clutter and a smart solution for waking up. Did you know sex cures doughnuts? And yes dear reader, a statement *can* be made for under \$100.00. Spend or splurge. The choice is yours. Greek goddess with a Standard poodle. Go ahead and throw a splash of paint on an accent wall. Brazen but smarter because you switched an opinion for egg whites. Bonne Meré washed up. Honey with those must-have, last-season stilettos you found at Nordstrom Rack. Must be both shapely and soft—rip the midsection. Keep the ass. It's as easy as Ikea furniture, like winging the perfect sharp wedge of eyeliner over any fretted promotion. Retro chic shoved into a terrarium—longer, leaner legs nestled in Reindeer moss and succulents. These can't-lose moves grant full access to whatever you'd like to hide underneath handcrafted vintage lightbulbs ordered off Etsy.com. White metal makes you look sleek, while trying to figure out what *keeping it real* even means anymore.

Still Personal Space

On my dresser, an owl mug filled
with \$600, beside it white sage, a crow
feather, one black crystal, and one white crystal.
I have a Dia de Los Muertes sculpture and a vial
of sand Kimberly brought from India's
Thar desert. In my room, I have a fan of gray
and black ostrich feathers from when
I danced. Shimmy down to my undies
any night of the week. I would too.

What comes to mind? *What will the children
think?* Will they know I made it home
before the Rohypnol kicked in, left
before David hit my face, got clean
before Jeremy OD'd? I'd better not.

In my room, I stack books about women,
about inner-city kids that know hip-hop
is legit art. About my white-girl-problems—
it starts with dad and ends with not taking
things personally. There are pictures
of where I grew up, a calendar of Italy,
and a pen and ink of an octopus drawn by my mother.
Also a pill bottle and a prayer flag
—I bow to both daily.

I still have the Walter Anderson card
Frankie gave me when he found out
I was swallowing my fingers instead
of my food. High on the shelf is a wicker basket
full of old family photos. I seldom
take them down. On a good day,
a *really* good day, I will ask you to come in,
show you around, and tell you how me
and Better Homes and Gardens have really
pulled this place together.

keatchi

vague threat of early november storms
you were gone from me
belonging now to pine woods
i think of your mother and her horses
and the shelves of cobwebbed aquariums
collecting dust in the tool shed
likening to an animal that has learned
to live with the buckshot still inside it
i have been moving through the backwoods
quietly carrying this body and
anything that will fit on my back
further away from you and your machines
i am following the river down
to a place where i never knew
how to speak your name

Omens

You owl found me

Quiet fly

I night find eye

—*whoosh*

It was . . . a wish?

. . . a death?

Ossification

No recollection of when my petrification occurred.
A slow exhalation of barely audible
breath bends its way through tissuey fascia,
arcs along the delicate curvature of a ribcage,
slips towards infinite release.

The scent of sweet olive and cypress catches
in the limestone cavern of my mouth.
Steals into me. Feel it settle.
Dark water in a cave.

My heart beat re-arranges with effort
to my bike being beaten
over grossly uneven pavement. I draw a
careful breath against
the metal frame. A tin canary.

I arrive at my doorstep
an awkward tremble. Squinting in the sunlight
I fumble for keys. Stone and metal hands.

Gracie Shakes

Boozy baby shake

shake

shake

for them boys

aaalllll night long

Pretty lined and

diamondyeddrunk

she

ssswing and ssswing

like a chimpanzee

from he to he (hee hee drunk she)

hot palms embalm

sweaty bills filled

Baby just daaaaaaaaaance

n' dance

float like a bubble

out of a champagne glass

all

the way

to the tippy

top

each inch a' skin

as important as the last

grinnin lipsticked lips

mouthin pretty lil kisses

to the lucky luck front row

she

shim-shake

a shark in stilettos that

Boozy baaaaaby takin

ev'ry thin she can get

to make up for what ain't

never been gived

she done turned regret

into a carousel ride

Iron Lion

Did you hear that Lonnie got the brakes beat off him? Down in the Quarter one night when he was back in town. // You know how he is a little too Mötley Crüe in the least ironic way possible? Well, he was at a strip club, or maybe it was after the strip club at The Abbey on Decatur // Anyway, he was pawing up all the pretty things // as per usual. *Then* some girl's goon of a boyfriend confronted him. And by *confront*, I mean threw him in an alley, smashed his face, and broke his left leg. Walt, from NOLA Tattoo, told me this. It was bad enough that he had to be hospitalized. // He does grip work for film and is out of a job for the next six months. // "Serves him right. He doesn't ever know when to stop and his penis is not God's gift," *I* wanted to say. // *I wanted* to say, "Fuck him for every nineteen year old and housewife he has bled dry." And I have only served him drinks. // His eyes. How even when he is howling and playing air drums to "Night of the Vampire," he still looks pretty damn sad. // How proud he is that he drinks Willie Nelson's vodka, has a lion mane of hair, and built his own bike. // But somehow that is funnier than it is sexy, and upon hearing this I felt bad about laughing. // I felt bad.

Sea Change

you come home
quiet I am a vision
the face twisted nude
pulled out some teeth
my rearranged furniture

am bursting
a full net
onto a salted deck

cut me *here* and *here*
caw caw caw
all albatross ah!
there I am!

think

I have pointed

urchinheart

chipped beaklips

I-10 West

Do you remember the time you moved to Colorado?

waking up that day was like
getting sunburns from negatives

...

nineteen hours in flight to Rome
analog Swatch dialed to melon dusk

...

Nile sends word weekday rain on the
two to the three o' clock in Louisiana

...

prayer candle between pillars and valleys
potential answers stretch to filament

...

colorblind Nile says cool, cause he
plays guitar and just—rainbows man

...

he, a phone call from home grinning
I, a sundress hum, as is, am coming

Why I don't drive down Old Fort Bayou Road

Driving back for Kimberly's baby shower
Between Gautier-Vancleave Road and Highway 90
I remembered the family of eagles
that lived on our property. High above
young pines that were farmed for timber,
a giant yellow pine blighted by lightning and
termites. It towered over the outskirts
of our main pasture. I first noticed the nest
in the winter, larger than any nest I had
ever seen. It perched precariously
at the top of the half-dead pine. I paused between
rushing to fill the claw foot "trough" for the horses
and doling out warm scoops of bran mash to the
impatiently knickering muzzles who smelled
the January treat. The domestic on-
goings of eagles was an enigma to
me—didn't they spend their time soaring above
mountain cliffs snatching up young cattle or clutching
arrows on executive emblems? I
informed Mom, Dad, and Dana. Then I headed
over to Grandad's house to tell him the news
and to borrow his army green binoculars
that he kept on a hook by the mesh cricket cage.
The porch was special replete with well-worn cane poles, and a deep
freezer. I could almost always find Grandad
there any time after three in the afternoon
with his tumbler of whiskey and water. Rocking
with a pipe in his mouth and the Sun Herald
in his enormous hands. When I gushed about
the eagles, he just pulled on his pipe and half
nodded his head towards the nest. "Oh, you mean them
birds? They been there for years now. Ate a couple
of my damn chickens, *Dummy-dummy Dum-Cough.*"
That was my nickname, and for some reason it
made me know that my Grandad wasn't as mean
as Mom kept swearing he was. In any case,
I watched the family all summer for about
four or five years. There weren't always babies, but
the pair came each year. Returning in winter
and staying through late spring. I later learned eagles
don't breed in the South and this couple was lost.
Also, eagles are more prone to eat fresh fish
not chickens—it was foxes that nabbed Grandad's
chickens. He would later fix the coop. Senior

year I thought about the pair and realized
it had been some time since I had seen them. I
grabbed the green binoculars and scanned the nest
and surrounding trees. No birds. The nest looked
torn up. Later that year Mom and Dad divorced
and sold the farm.

When I go home now, I do not drive
down Old Fort Bayou Road with its blind
curves and potholes. I do not drive by to see
Grandad's house with someone else in it, or the space
where the shed used to be. Don't look at the barn
to see someone else's horses milling about the pasture,

but I do sometimes, like today, look skyward
and hope to see the dark silhouette
of a former family member
soaring on a warm Southern wind

Snapfrost

You called it a blackberry winter

I've heard others say
strawberry or dogwood.

Outside my window,

the monstrosity of a fig tree
has sets of perfect baby figs on it.

I woke to find them frozen—killed

by five a.m.'s frost. *The*
fairytale where all the young things die.

If you don't believe me,

I could show you a picture:

a young palm frond shellacked in ice
glistened, crippled.

It is still winter, you know,

no time for flowers; all over
uptown gardens are reckless.

The Easter Parade has started too soon.

Diving Bells Don't Work

My living room becomes
barnacles and bone. Sifts
weather and tides.

The figs are frozen.
I watch the frost.

Life moves—a bark canoe,
there's kelp.

I open the window:
I think *wet leaves*.
I find the photograph.

Those notes
I write down.
Do you think
the frost, figs, forest give
silent permission

in the midst of the making
of every accident?

What it means to speak broken Spanish

No lo olvides We squawked out
of the truck window (it was said about
the stop sign, but continued late
to late evening). “I always forget,” she said.

She was left smiling on a coastline
frondas de palma played at tiger stripes:
la tigresa her freckled face—*rayas*.

Squinting from sunlight,
fue imposible to see her eyes;
her words to the *gaviotas* and rising tides.

She moved away, *por un momento*, to
touch his hand. Late September off
la costa de San Felipe in Baja Norte, Mex.

Los perros came up *mojado y expectante*.
In the blinking surf *lacrimas* were
dismissed. *Gaviotas* kept screaming

congratulations, while wiry *pescadores*
squirted bleach-water into the coral
to fish for *pulpos* between tidal swells.

The *gaviotas* scream louder.
The seafoam persistently displays itself;
no lo olvides little sister.

With her on her coast and me on mine,
no lo olvides is the square root of
a prayer and a command.

Ars Poetica

A volley of arrows will
hail down on you at any
given moment. And, let's be honest,
these moments—stolen.
Took too long to move
now skin is wet soil. Won't stand
for long in these conditions.
Been hiding in the mud so long
the moss between fingers
thicks. The still sets in fast.
The cowboys and the Indians
have teamed up just to prove
they could, and they are coming
up quick. Hooves quake the packed
earth. The sound of fists
into worn baseball gloves
swells your ears. You begin
to lose focus. The ticker feed
at the bottom of the screen scrolls
the steadily falling stock. Scrolls
the seventh suicide bomber
this week. The global climate has
just risen one full degree in the
past hour. You slam your fists
against your helmet. Let metal
skull echo you back to now.
Mayday! Repeat Mayday!
Except you can't remember
what Granddaddy did when
he was attacked. Can't remember
why you're here in the first place.
But don't you dare go blaming
the cowboys and Indians. Steady
yourself —slow. You didn't get the gun,
ain't that kind of war. So take
that arrow. It is your only one,
mind you. And when they come
for you—you must remember not
to cry for the horses. You have seen
the movies and know the horses
always die first. Not a prayer or a whimper.
Fire your shot and look to the sky.

Lullaby

the sanctuary farmer

protects the birds to rob them blind

a lifetime molted into one comforter

how to stay warm on the dark nights

down down dark n' sleepy down down,

MamMaw hums this little made up

as she tucks me in to the too big bed

lightswitch, there is no weight

only legs of heat, spreading.

Nest Diorama

Take you home
the baby bird I found when I was six.
Scoop you in a shoebox,
shine a desk lamp on you.

*Can't go back now—your mother
will kill you. She'll smell me
on you, starve you to death. She'll gossip
to your brothers and sisters:
Tear him apart. Never get better.*

So many sad, the backyard moments of tiny bones, re-arrange
mosquito bit, underneath live oak, underneath
no tellin' where we'll end up.

Sky shot with storm clouds, criminal
blistered ribbons of lilac and grey.
Already I am shook. *It is just no good*
my fingers squeezing and squeezing.

Kiss your hands and feet and put you back, back
where you belong. *I had bad bad dreams
this morning, baby.* And you didn't make it.

I'm so sorry, I'm so sorry: that's what I want to say, baby.

Hands full butterflies, bandages, mine, ready to tape you up
but I can't see when the sunlight
floods the room like this.

I wouldn't say *precisely* or *it's reprieve*,
blindness has its benefits.

I grab my blue windbreaker,
slip out for a long walk. The blood runs
faucets for this. I start to say *If you need me baby...*
but the words hang

Pelagic (Missed Connection)

I was a shark kept
tried
speak to you. my lips
ribbony sliced out
there was blood and \$10
wine my summer dress.
slurred my sensation that
one is on a ship but
because of those goddamn.
rows of them
running across my jaws
(*tiburón*) (*peligro*)
(*esta enferma*). I think
I hear the walls speech. I
know should shut up, but
that doesn't stop that
doesn't keep hitting the
floor. apparently this, to be
expected so I mumble through
my whisper. I lose
another mouth. I am supposed
to say *me this way*
supposed to better but
shark out.
instead *pelagic territory a deep*
seated of men. I am getting
too I know this
noise do not stop. You blink
a squid. Ink and
bathroom tile.
You are the
nightmare I have I am six.

VITA

Sarah Carole Howze is a Mississippi Gulf Coast native. She has been a New Orleans resident for the past eight years. Upon her completion of her MA in English at the University of New Orleans, she will attend an MFA program for Poetry somewhere in the Southwest in the Fall of 2013.-