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## Sugarcane Crossroads

Sean Carrero

University of New Orleans, [swcarrer@uno.edu](mailto:swcarrer@uno.edu)

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Sugarcane Crossroads

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 Fine Arts  
in  
Creative Writing  
Poetry

by

Sean William Carrero

B.A. Florida International University, 2015

May, 2019

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## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iv
Culture Denied: A Preface.....	1
I.	
Nuyorican Abuelo.....	7
Abuela & Me.....	8
Self-Portrait Without Pride.....	9
Sugarcane Crossroads.....	10
Through a Dark Window.....	11
On Waiting.....	12
Dedication to Grandpa Bill.....	13
Watermark.....	14
An Artist inside an Art Space.....	15
Where Does Wind Begin?.....	16
Extended Metaphor with Iguanas.....	17
II.	
Love Poem.....	19
Self-Portrait with Bullet Wounds.....	20
The Sound of Love Kissing.....	21
Bound to Disenchanters.....	22
Realizing her absence, like an eternity.....	23
Meditation for Family.....	24
Four Haiku.....	25
Response to Matt's Letter.....	26
Jackson and Coliseum.....	27
III.	
When the Dusk Settles.....	29
The Constant Commotion of Cars.....	30
Home after Closing Shift.....	31
Most Mornings.....	32
On My Break at Work.....	33
Seven A.M.....	34
Ransom the Dying Breath.....	35
Wasting Time at Night.....	36
Peasant Cry, an Aubude.....	37
For the Stars.....	38
Vita.....	39

## Abstract

The following manuscript is a collection of lyric poetry that touches on themes of family history, love, and labor in the service industry. It is divided into three sections. The speaker in the work dwells in mostly private spaces and deals with private symbols such as, water, to represent the father figure in the poems.

Keywords: decent; identity; culture; food; imagism; nature.

## Culture Denied: A Preface

*There is a world that poets cannot seem to enter. It is the world everybody else lives in. And the only thing poets seem to have in common is their yearning to enter this world.*

—Mary Ruefle, *Madness, Rack, and Honey*

I find solace in these words by Mary Ruefle. For me, I have always had a yearning for this world. After playing in several high school garage bands, and dabbling with TV Production, I attended college and dropped out. One day, I was visiting the apartment of my best friend, Stef, who was pursuing a bachelor's degree in English at the time; she flipped through the *Selected Poems of William Carlos Williams* and told me to read "The Red Wheelbarrow." This poem transported and transformed me. It made me want to make other people feel what I felt in that moment. We discussed how the compressed and poignant language conveyed emotion in the absence of people. I came to poetry in that moment, and immediately afterwards, I returned to college to pursue an English degree.

I consider myself fortunate to be included in the academic community because it affords me opportunities my family cannot. During my time as an undergraduate, my professor and mentor, Dr. Carmela McIntire, shared her own experience of moving away from home to pursue education. It distanced her from those closest to her as she was breaking tradition within her family. Her father died shortly after. She explained that despite the adversity from her family, she continued to pursue her academic career and, over time, found community within the student network in her reach. Like McIntire, I was not born into a family of books. Growing up, my attention and patience were slim, and I learned better through experiencing a subject on my own in the most hands-on way. My experience with the education system, especially, supported my rebellious behaviors. The effects of this system rendered me unmotivated and left me disengaged with learning in school.

In fact, my interpretation of my identity had been warped from an early age. When my grandfather would pick up my sister and me from school, he would take us to get pastries at a convenience store down the street from the trailer park where he lived with my grandma, but my mother did not encourage us to go there. Despite the treat my grandfather would buy for us, I behaved with estrangement and complained to my grandmother about her trailer home. As a kid, I let my mother's influence negatively filter my entire experience with them, so I always felt conflicted about being Puerto Rican. My mother did not support my father when he tried teaching us to speak Spanish. I did not learn from my Puerto Rican relatives how to dance salsa, and I spent limited time with my father's parents. I was denied access to this place and my identity, and I wished more than anything to be a part of it then, and I still do to this day. Now, as an adult, I am responsible for learning about myself and my culture. And it is through poetry that I transfer what I know. In this manuscript, for instance, I try exploring aspects of my Puerto Rican culture as a child in the poems, "Nuyorican Abuelo" and "Abuela & Me," which open the manuscript. I always knew that whenever my father spoke in Spanish that it was like being in an entirely different world. Poetry has been a platform for exploring interrogations, wonderings, or longing about my identity.

Imagist poets, such as Williams and Pound, have impacted my idea of attention to detail, descriptive imagery, and meaningful diction. Primarily in the first section of the manuscript, the speaker reimagines his younger self, navigating his relationship with his father, through the recollection of images. In the poems, "Through a Dark Window," "Where Does Wind Begin," and "Extended Metaphor with Iguanas," I explore his relationship with his father during different moments from his life. Inspired by the way Li-Young Lee handles a father-son narrative in his debut collection, *Rose*, I felt compelled also to try to balance grief, longing, and loss. In "Where

Does Wind Begin?" I imagine the father as rain so that the distance between the son and father becomes more vivid in the poem. This poem presents shorter, more expressive lines, as I work for clarity by directly treating the son's image of the father, as one who "holds my attention. The blades/ of weeds, thin hair on a forearm,/ wrestle the setting sun behind the clouds." I convey the way the father attempts to communicate with the son but falls short: "My father's voice is a wealth of swamp,/ not a twilight color/ that grants me wishes."

Beyond portraying a father-son relationship, my identity is also an issue I have been trying to understand through poetry. In writing about my Puerto Rican heritage, I have been guided by poets of color such as Orlando Menes, Li-Young Lee, and Terrance Hayes. All have informed my process in the way they treat their poems with food and body imagery. Lee and Hayes focus on the body, such as Lee does in "Pillow," when he ties identity to images of the father's body: "Night is the shadow of my father's hands/ setting the clock for resurrection." In "Three Measures of Time," Hayes conveys identity similarly through bodily images: "A mouth of bad teeth and a past bland/ as grease and hair too thin for color." In "Elegy for Great Uncle Julio, Cane Cutter," Menes characterizes not through the body, but through other organic images, such as when he describes "Uncle Manny [who] would say/ bit ripe tomatoes like apples, dimple dripping." This technique excites me and influences how I incorporate food and the body to talk about my culture. The journey has caused me to go back farther than the recent past. Sitting with moments from childhood has yielded more illuminating features about my identity as a white-passing Latino kid who was unfamiliar with his own grandparents' home-cooking. The poems "Nuyorican Abuelo," and "Abuela & Me" touch on this subject matter.

My first encounter with "The Red Wheelbarrow" catapulted my motivation to investigate why language presented this way evokes empathy, harmony, and resolutions. Exploring the



different ways poetry functions in formal containers has given me the opportunity to organize the language. The structure of a poem clearly relates all of its elements, cohesively and coherently, to lead the reader to a precise meaning and tone. My faith in this communicative property of the structure of language has led me to start to experiment with poetic forms as guides rather than hindrances to self-expression. By the end of the manuscript, poems begin making sense through language communicated in formal structures. I appreciate the way the sonnet container, as Menes says, “with all its compressive virtues,” prepares the mind to distill language down to what is essential for the poem. And I believe the poem, in return, works with the poet through this sequence of operation.

In a lecture on craft at the 2017 Palm Beach Poetry Festival, the poet Carl Philips said, “Structure is why we come back to a poem.” I find an aesthetic pleasure in structure likened to the frame or border of a piece of visual art. Writing mostly from memory in free verse is liberating, yet, at times too fleeting, so it can actually further obscure an image or detail, rather than clarify a mood from a memory. Setting up such parameters as terza rima, for instance, has helped me to shape the poem, “Self Portrait with Bullet Wounds.” This traumatic public event, like the mass shooting that took place in Las Vegas in Fall 2017, became less difficult to write with the aid of structure. Similarly, I was inspired by the poem “Sa Gow,” by Frances Chung, which is contained in the Pantoum form and is set in the rhetorical mode, while it weaves together moments about the speaker’s father’s home. The restrictive, recursive nature of this structure requires precise imagery by putting language under even more pressure, such as in “Meditation for Family.” Here, for me, at least, the layering of the repeated lines function to simply and amplify—even to elevate—the most poignant moment of a memory.

As a poet, I hope to continue to explore my family history for the sake of keeping it alive. Through the written word and print media, I resist erasure. It is clear that my poetry comments on or critiques our culture, from within and without. With this agency through poetry, I can revisit what has come before, translate it by adding my position, and with luck, ultimately, enhance this literary genre. My hope is to transport readers into an experience they might not have had, or one that is familiar yet resonates for them while reading so that they, too, may feel liberated or unburdened, however briefly.



## Nuyorican Abuelo

As I sit on this couch most evenings, the scent of  
frying plantains from Abuela's kitchen settles  
in my thick black hair. She cooks alone.

My mainland hands, as if meant  
for stroking water, not hair,  
fear fighting and crossing knuckles in prayer.

I prefer frozen pizza over Abuela's pasteles.  
*Moncho*, Abuela calls my Abuelo. He prays,  
loud as a late-night grasshopper-humming.

From his bedroom, I hear Abuelo and learn  
his nickname, *Moncho*. I learn  
*Moncho* sleeps without a mosquito net.

Once, you were Puerto Rico's best boxer. You punched  
the way a mule kicks. I remember that sliver of gold  
in your front tooth, Abuelo. As for me

I've never known the weight of a twelve-hour day,  
the dull curve of a sugarcane machete. Yet, Abuelo,  
in my palms, I trace my own life lines, each

chart a chapter of your past, whispers,  
as though I, too, must cut sugarcane, break  
coconuts, to plant these seeds.

## Abuela & Me

Pork chop steam permeates her tiny trailer.  
Her next telenovela tells the time. Her floral  
dresses hang in the back closet,  
the same ones my father will donate  
when he gets over her passing. A  
crowd of glass relics rest easily, summon-  
ing all too quietly their heirs. I cannot  
understand a word they say. The blue white pig  
smiles with rosy blue cheeks while the Don Q  
coqui leans on his brown barrel.

May these spirits find their way back home, home  
away from home, and never settle  
for mere complacency. Imitation plants  
line her kitchen counter. I recognize  
in the gap in my Abuela's mouth  
the gap between my own teeth. A clear sheet  
of plastic instead of a table cloth  
covers her wooden kitchen table.

Onto my plate, she scoops white rice from her pot—  
her rice and beans as foreign to me as she is,  
I smother them with ketchup. Her mouth is full  
of Spanish. Her voice is a Flamboyant tree. Her tongue  
is a pepper. I have never stopped hearing, like  
the cracked bell in St. Peter's church,  
this old war raging in my belly.

## Static Pride

In this mirror I find my father's history  
tucked in the curve  
of my right eyebrow.

I believe more in evening,  
a promise to nightfall,  
less than in the son I am.

Inside of me hides a brown-eyed animal,  
small enough  
to fit inside  
a pigeon pea.

My father only spoke when  
I was trouble; he knew  
a lot about trouble,  
a lot about speaking Spanish

in school and getting held back.  
If I subtract this minor loss,  
it might make it difficult  
to return to my childhood

not knowing how to speak Spanish.  
And when I told him the kids bullied me,  
his anger  
was a guitar played with daggers  
instead of a pick.

## Sugarcane Crossroads

1.

I stop putting the wind into boxes,  
piercing a dark room with my body,  
making and unmaking myself again.

2.

Winds under the same sun,  
under the same grey clouds;  
winds move through cane stalk  
on a U.S. territory;  
winds in the year my father's father died;  
winds over rust on my father's hammer spread,  
fold in memory, three birthplaces  
into one history.

3.

My father, steady as water,  
never nourishes me,  
though he is strong  
as a sugarcane-boxer.

4.

His breath brings a Taino  
gospel, uttered across the Atlantic sea.

5.

A road develops,  
down the block from one out of order—  
a portrait of him and me.

6.

Where our dead generations on this earth  
formerly stood, those three winds begin.

## Through a Dark Window

At home, flames flicker inside our heater.  
Meanwhile, breezes blow as if tethered  
to sunset. These sour minutes sink  
to the bottom—three orange hues, two magenta, one pink.  
More sky comes this way, evolves.

The carpool line at a Catholic school ends,  
as though releasing like doves  
its hundred small children from the palms  
of two hands. Still, the boy awaits his father.  
A deaf grief grips his vocal chords.

Now, on my knees I pray  
for his father to come soon,  
in the way sunflowers at night  
wait for the morning.  
I wait, head bent toward my chest.



## On Waiting

1

Dead grass or hair caught in my mouth is the weight  
of afternoon. The afternoon drags itself

West while I alone inhabit a parking lot  
after the carpool line has disappeared.  
Ashamed as if

an over-ripened avocado  
has been smeared across my forehead,  
I shuffle away from the teachers  
in seventh grade.

2

Look how the road showed no  
sign of him. It is not hair, nor dead  
grass, just mutilated pride, as if my heart  
had risen into my throat, as if from afar

he circled the school, its location slipping  
barely in his mind, like a pirate ship  
slipping in a glass jar. Have I

gone missing? I remember  
the wind blowing leaves right through me.

## **Ghazal for Grandpa Bill**

A chimney like a filing cabinet on this floor  
blocks clouds that plume above. I stand on this floor.

I am a young boy. He practices scales on his clarinet  
every Saturday afternoon in his chair on his floor,

his vibrato wide as an Italian vineyard  
of grapes that when he drinks give him the floor.

With pins in cheeks that sting like a lie, like the weight the  
lips endure, he plays the sound until it gives him the floor.

At fifteen he began playing tenor sax,  
but by ninety-one his hip gives him the floor.

He teaches me sax one afternoon. I blow  
weak breath through wood that gives him the floor.

I hear coins from a woman's purse hit the street  
with much clarity as the Sean-Billy he did speak.

## Watermark

I hear the families drown from here.  
In his slippers and sleepwear full of pride,  
Papa irons my clothes. His body angles over  
the ironing board like an old guy  
with nothing but his thoughts to give.

Meanwhile, the day's last minutes drag  
like an old wooden kitchen chair  
across a dusty floor:  
Dusk peers over the houses around us  
until night's bluest hour matches the inside of my eyelids.

I cross my fingers and  
wish his god might hear his small prayers,  
like rain against the Cathedral Basilica  
St. John the Baptist. Homesick  
for an island covered in rain un-  
incorporated, with its sovereignty  
on mute, white as breadfruit, bright as the waves  
that circle the small island, arms folded—  
he snores from the couch.

## **An Artist inside an Art Space**

The pride of a righteous man warps  
when the BSO lets him go;

his contract, antiquated and masculine, unwraps.  
I was no more than four. Now at ten

I mow the lawn where no one dies,  
steer the mower blades clear

around dirt mounds, like a helicopter  
maneuvering mountains,

as the ants cultivate these clods.  
From the voice of my father has worked

ten jobs since then, I learn  
to shave each blade of grass evenly—

his voice more lawn mower than father;  
his giant arms that once did press inmates' necks

against cells; his skin tobacco-leaf brown,  
the way plantains turn brown, slowly, evenly.

We commune through a federal reserve of language,  
a collective consciousness, maybe, but one

neither of us is yet conscious of within our silence,  
like an artist inside an art space.

As he holds my hand in prayer, I tug away:  
He tugs back, and my heart explodes

into a forest of mangoes in an empty yard—  
not quite a shipwreck, not quite saved,

I take refuge in this body of mine.  
It tastes of waiting, like dead grass—

this body my father gives me, my father who,  
all his life, holds his word from the world.

## Where Does Wind Begin?

I dream where wind begins.  
Meanwhile, my father arrives  
as rain at the window,  
each drop an ivory note

luring a crowd his way.  
In the distance, a puddle  
rounds in the shape of a manatee,  
holds my attention. The blades

of weeds, thin hair on a forearm,  
wrestle the setting sun behind the clouds.  
My father's voice is a wealth of swamp,  
not a twilight color

that grants me wishes.  
Just the sound of it exhausts me,  
so I've given up listening to his stories.  
I do not grow more fatherless,

but turn to him when he pauses.  
And I wait, as any good son would  
after days of slow rain—yet still  
I do not hear a word, not one word.

## Extended Metaphor with Iguanas

The lake is alive for once this June.  
The iguanas float on their bellies or  
skitter above the water's surface; rising sediments  
underwater expand like a cloud, tiny  
clay pieces in slow motion that collapse  
like demolition debris and settle

into the smoky murk below.  
I drown in this dream,  
reach for the semi-circle silhouette  
of my family standing together  
on the dock my father and I built  
long ago, now dilapidated.

The tendon inside the neck of one of the iguanas  
near the end of its life tears when  
its neck catches on the chain link  
as old as this dock.

Even if the wind rattles from the trees,  
relentlessly, all their leaves

here, my father sits further away  
from his mind than we  
are here, as we sit  
in separate rooms.

II

## Love Poem

I do not beg her for water in a flood  
or for the truth in her language. I trust  
like a man holds a bird for offering  
even while it pecks his hand with its beak.  
Our bodies coil in my bed. Through  
my window screen, light seeps like honey  
as her hands and my lips negotiate and twist  
with the brutal tenderness of the wind  
caressing the tops of poplars in Spring.  
She absorbs too much of me. We restlessly lie  
in this city.  
But in a single stroke, I gather  
everything menacing about hair into my palm.



## Self-Portrait with Bullet Wounds

—*after the Las Vegas shooting*

Farewell! my love, tonight was full of dread.  
A barrage of bullets from the balcony  
rained like hail upon us as we fled.

Just humans enjoying a symphony  
under the moonlight, from within the fog  
suddenly we screamed, a cacophony

of music for the dead. I thought of God  
as a desert father. Here, He reigned  
as emperor of the crimson-meadow crowd;

as though from three days of pelting rain,  
our faces turned much whiter as we bled.  
If a wild magnolia once felt this pain,

one foot below the grass, our final bed,  
took root on mute as we did become dead.

## The Sound of Love Kissing

All of me remains quiet  
as my backyard grass;  
a dewy dark green  
waves as the rain strikes each blade.  
To open ourselves to someone freely:  
to give without needing anything in return.  
The sound of love kissing  
rainfall as it splatters—  
a symphony sharing sympathy  
with the dry earth—continues  
penetrating the grass.  
Here earth touches sky.

Our hearts beat in the tiny roots,  
as when we attended  
the last movie on a cold  
Saturday night, and we wrapped  
ourselves into each other.

When the rain stopped, you could hear  
our eye contact as loud  
as two blades of grass, rubbing  
when they touched.

## Bound to Disenchanters

She smiles on me, crookedly casts a spell.  
Wind is ever ordinary. *Chime!* goes the bell.

She weaves flowers near the bayou bank's dew;  
the shallow water is a wounded-blue.

Redolent patchouli exudes off her neck,  
teaches me how to taste noble darkness.

Is wisteria a tree or vines on the tree,  
a deeply rusted aristocracy?

I admire in the dew, bees breaking  
out dry jasmine, swarming and buzzing.

I lean my face close to her breast and pause  
to hear the thump, the human cause

of my yearning, and with my ear near her eyes,  
she whispers under sunrise something I despise.

## **Realizing her absence, like an eternity**

Realizing her absence, like an eternity  
per minute, I drown in sorrow. My mind,  
like a pasture of clover in the country, floods.  
No birds chirp.

Meanwhile, clouds that collect rain tease me;  
the dancing in my heart steps off its beat,  
yet, subdued for now, I must keep  
steadily breathing to imprint in my chest

thoughts from the past of us together,  
intimate in our nature, intimate as hair on her lip.  
As my breath heats up the air, rain begins falling,  
moistening, moistening the entire meadow.

## **Meditation for Family**

On these trees outside my window,  
I noticed the dew after three days of rainfall.  
Noon peeled the morning away like an old scab  
until the sunlight lay cut up like rotted porch planks.

I noticed the dew after three days of rainfall  
across my neighbor's hedge  
until the sunlight lay cut up like rotted porch planks,  
over the pale white gardenia petals.

Across my neighbor's hedge,  
the nimble moths floated like shade  
over the pale white gardenia petals  
for a scent that held the moth's history.

The nimble moths floated like shade.  
I am still clueless about cultivating love  
or that scent that held the moth's history.  
It took me many tries to utter sorry

and I am still clueless about cultivating love  
yet I know I am from a small village.  
It took me many tries to utter sorry:  
I am still clueless about decay,

though I know I am a small village.  
Noon peeled morning away like an old scab,  
and I am still clueless about decay  
on these trees outside my window.

### Three Haiku

Autumn light showers:  
pine needles below our feet,  
lips marry, eyes glow.

\*

Six P.M., air creeps  
into the walls of my home—  
owls burrow home.

\*

A snowy tree branch  
speaks in the last stir of rice.  
Steam rises; birds fly.

## Response to Matt's Letter

We each shave our heads at the beginning  
of each summer, only to let it grow scraggily

with time. We live far from each other,  
both by salt water, in eastern coastal towns.

What do four deer look like near a cluster of trees  
beneath a pale-glowing North Dakota sun?

I know of these big spiny veins that sprout through the sidewalks  
here in New Orleans, where moss grows. Around thirty

degrees in January, we suffer three long days  
below freezing. The sidewalk chaps and cracks.

Those four deer—still for a moment, staring, as your train  
passes them along the horizon—

are they like the baby squirrels that squall  
from between a wall and a trashcan?

## Jackson and Coliseum

In the starless sky,  
the moon is as absent as our dead  
grandmother. Across Coliseum,  
a man who looks like my cousin  
talks on his phone in one hand,  
cradles a beer can in his elbow  
to ignite his lighter, the way my cousin  
might have, had my cousin given himself  
up to the Opa-Locka triangle.

The Episcopal building behind the man points  
toward the sky; the cross  
on top, grand as God this evening,  
revels as though it is the closest  
chiseled stone architecture this side of  
our dead grandmother. Its wooden  
doors could let a giant inside; between concrete  
its center clutches stained-glass windows.

Neither my cousin nor I believe  
in sitting behind pews to ask forgiveness.  
Oak trees that spiral from the earth,  
appear larger than this church door.  
I hope the smoke coaxing his mouth leads him like  
our dead grandmother's words lead us.





## When the Dusk Settles

Does this espresso  
machine control me?  
My hands guide the milk  
froth over a cup, a  
ceramic-cappuccino  
cup. Strangers line the café  
as though awaiting  
their fortunes to be  
read to them. Peak time  
demands happiness  
for my rent and my rest, for bills  
and complacency. Although  
I do not know where  
these beans do grow,  
I can tell you where  
to go relieve pee,  
despite your ambivalence  
about the tip jar. My back  
clots with ten years; pain  
punctures like a fist,  
leaves bruises, but here,  
my back holds the pain,  
scars that wonder when my job,  
this little chore, will pay off.  
My strength decreases  
my tissues over  
time, fragile as grace.  
You need not know where  
the tip jar is, but look no  
farther than the second floor  
for the bathrooms when  
the dusk settles.  
The crowd dies down, I  
sweep straw wrappers,  
little crumbs. My hands guide milk  
froth—my hands, forever mine,  
however numb.

## **The Constant Commotion of Cars**

I am no one special here—the barista  
who works eight hours a day for eight years.  
From across the lake echoes the constant  
commotion of the cars inside my ears,  
the same way trains pummel through tunnels: No light.  
Dusk, however, as a boat, sails through  
the purple—as a streetlight, half-working, holds  
five birds. It has no tale, except one,  
of a man who is at once a slave and a king  
of ten tablets covered in moss  
without God on its side, it takes flight from the noise  
against another's will.

## Home after Closing Shift

1

like harp notes, rain starts  
within this static traffic  
strumming each minute

2

wonky weight sinking  
my ankles, silt in water  
drowns sidewalks downtown

3

men with slick shoes and even  
slicker haircuts, men in suits  
who sit all day doing what  
some men may say is the Lord's work

4

two light bulbs not three fill light  
along my apartment walls  
with as much intensity as the sun  
turning orange, magenta, or away below the horizon  
leaf scrapes leaf across puddles  
raindrops splatter onto window panes—  
however dark my organs may be,  
dusk gushes and meets a moon, and yellow  
punctures the foggy throat of day

5

eyelash on a lens  
molecule in microscope  
the silencing numbs

6

in a gesture from El Greco,  
I reach for the light switch  
night is here  
so I turn it back off.

## Most Mornings

The world rotates in space  
yet I'll never be able to change  
the way my face looks. My mouth

avoids the word *Amen* on Sundays  
and *American* on most other days.  
I wake suffering the bruised back

of bad sleep as I observe, slowly,  
breathing through the crook of my nose.  
Open to my eyes, the vein

in my right wrist, a transitory blue  
puddle like a little lizard tail,  
throbs, the wildest thing, pale

whole, mine—a song that alleviates  
this tight space phobia, my day.

## **On My Break at Work**

Empty, but mutely hopeful  
like the remaining alligator pears  
after a hurricane,

the seats in the mall cafeteria  
on a Sunday afternoon gather themselves  
and sit quietly. The TV plays a soccer match.

One janitor does not care  
if you see him watch the game  
while his head slightly tilts.

I recognize the glare  
of bright lights bounce  
against his pose.

Is this where people dream  
into futures?

Or flashing from a chamber  
where dreams come true?

## Seven A.M.

This was not a movie where people  
watched me wake up alone, again.

A moth was crushed against the wood floors  
the way I would punch-in my timestamp,  
and my eyelids wanted more dreams.

The tension in morning commuters—  
I should have made coffee.

The magnolia trees asked for a glass of water  
or rainfall in that minute. In that minute

all I wanted was the banging inside my head to stop,  
and a dozen donuts, all different flavors.

## **Ransom the Dying Breath**

On the refrigerator, purple light spreads  
across my friend's letter. I draw the end  
of the soap bottle that dribbles air bubbles.

Dishes big and small like people splayed on the sand,  
at the beach, dry on two towels next to the sink.

Inside a postcard on the wall, a Frida self-portrait  
gazes at me as though I am not listening fully.  
I try keeping this kitchenette clean.

My father never asked me  
to count the number of breaths  
a person takes per day. The sun

like orange juice on this counter I've just wiped,  
spills across a field of autumn grass.



## **Wasting Time at Night**

*after Robert Frost*

I used to get lost wasting time at night.  
I'd speak to random strangers in the rain.  
Doubtless I acted foolish in this light.

More than once I'd find the saddest city lane—  
more likely it found me, stumbling, off beat,  
and I would lack the right words to explain.

So many people trip over their own feet.  
Louder than a muttering, mumbling cry,  
you could hear them mumbling down the street.

They made no effort to nod or say goodbye  
filled with beer and smoke beyond delight,  
a yellowish-silver anchored in the sky.

Guilt encroached on my left, my right.  
I used to waste time getting lost at night.

## Peasant Cry, An Aubade

Summer is nine months away.  
My palm rests wide open across  
my cheek in each exhale and  
like a vision of the future  
plays with beginner-fingers, the lyre.  
The wind pounds the way a laborer  
hammers nails into wood.  
Moss pieces, intricate as my loose hairs, etch light  
across the day as delicately as Utamaro's  
fine brush strokes. Cicadas speak,  
but I do not follow  
their vibration; my palms press  
wide open on the window pane.

## For the Stars

I am only as precious as my reflection  
locked like memory inside this mirror  
or—as perfect as the contents of

this window I gaze through at night: each star,  
each hue of blue. I'm not knotted  
to any of these stars, such as Cereus

blooming like corn stock in August  
with the noise of a dream unfolding  
only the deaf could hear, or like a stitch

of thread woven the way colloquialisms  
mash and sometimes stand for multiple phrases—Cereus  
petals pierce night as if my grandmother's

hands clasped for prayer; the opposite of  
these petals would be sunflowers, for here,  
they bloom in the night.

## Vita

Sean William Carrero is from Hollywood, Florida. He lives in New Orleans, LA. He completed his undergraduate work at Florida International University where he received a bachelor's degree in English. He received his Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing under the direction of John Gery from the Creative Writing Workshop at the University of New Orleans. Sean was a reader for *Bayou* magazine August 2016 until May 2019. In his 2017 Summer semester abroad at the Brunnenburg castle, John Gery facilitated the poetry workshop and literature course focusing on *The Cantos* of Ezra Pound. Pound's daughter, Mary de Rachewiltz, lent us her insight on this epic poem in and out of the classroom. He is the recipient of an Honorable Mention in the Andrea Saunders Gereighty/ Academy of American Poets Award, 2019 and in the Vassar Miller Poetry Award 2019, and in the Vassar Miller Poetry Award 2018. His poetry can be found in *Ellipsis* literary journal.