

OVER STATE LINES: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN

---

A Thesis

Presented to

the Faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities

Morehead State University

---

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

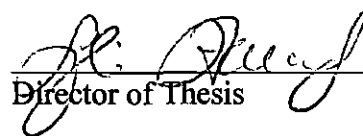
---

by

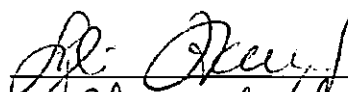
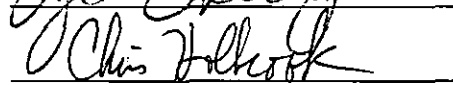
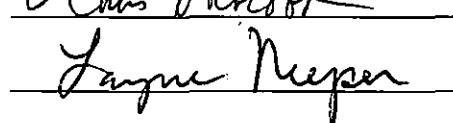
Melodie Past

2004

Accepted by the faculty of the Caudill College of Humanities, Morehead State University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Director of Thesis

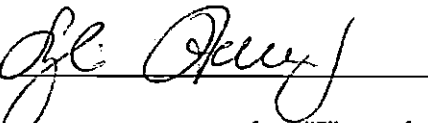
Master's Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_, Chair  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

20 Jan 2005  
Date

## OVER STATE LINES: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN


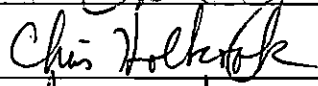
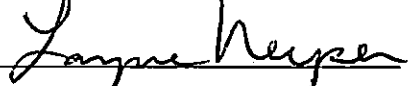
Melodie Past, M.A.  
Morehead State University, 2004

Director of Thesis: 

This collection of poetry uses unnamed or "I" speakers who work toward discovery or epiphany—work revealed through the use of space and time motifs and may therefore be considered to be in a phenomenological vein. The major question in this collection is whether the sacred and secular are discernible. The majority of these poems are lyrical in that even the narrative poems work to arouse emotion as a means to invoking new realities in the reader. Vigilant attention is paid to language, therefore the multivalent nature of this lyric collection allows for multiple interpretations rather than for obscurity or incoherence. Manufacturing of poetry is done through line breaking, experimental technique, diction, figurative language and other imagery and ideas, and in other ways traditionally accepted to be methods of construction in poetry. This collection fully subscribes to the worth of reader response as a way to divining meaning from the text. Part of the text may be considered semi-autobiographical but its intent should not be characterized as confessional if not used in the loosest sense of the style—its use of an "I" speaker. To characterize this collection as confession would diminish its scope. The careful attention which is paid to individual experience is an outgrowth of its

phenomenological underpinnings. This group of poems is an exploration of experience and imagined experience, action and imagined action, reaction and imagined reaction expressed through the music of language and from the cinematography of the mind.

Accepted by:

  
\_\_\_\_\_, Chair  
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Over State Lines: Somewhere Between**

## Contents

I. Over State Lines	
Over State Lines: Somewhere Between	1
What's on the Line	2
Freeport, Grand Bahama Island	3
Birthing Words	6
Thesis on Cheap Energy	7
Mouth Breathers, Nothing Matters	8
No Swimming	9
Domino Effects	10
Dada is Mmm . . .	11
Ferlinghetti Did This	12
Tell Me, Pain	13
After the Ice Storm	14
An End	15
II. What We Know	
Within This Rhythm	16
Without the Oasis Within	17
What We Want, or What We Get	18
What We Want, or What We Get II	19
Camping	20
What We Seek, or What We Find	21
Guide to Getting There Alive	22
What You Do When You Get There	23
What We Know, or What We Learn	24
III. Field Guide to the Night Sky	
Antipodal Lune	25
Summer Glances	26
Plate Tectonics	27
Looking for the Big Bang	28
Freedom Movement	30
IV. Dance or Fly	
Next Spring: A Healthy Blossom?	31
Thesis of an Essay on a Canvas	32

Essay on a Canvas	33
Waiting for the End	34
Moving Statues of Liberty	35
V. Sink or Sing	
My Children Laughing	36
Harmony	37
Four-Year-Old Son Sees "The Seafarer"	38
Valuing Statues, or What Falls from the Sky	39

## I. Over State Lines



## OVER STATE LINES: SOMEWHERE BETWEEN

Give me a place to stand, and I will move the earth.  
—Archimedes, circa 235 BC

The river has frozen over. We stand  
on its milky glass and glare  
all the restraint to run away  
with our eyes, with furious anger and love  
for ourselves. My brother has chosen  
an ice chunk I could never have lifted.  
We bicker because we love each other  
and somewhere in our childish minds  
we know we won't be able to bicker forever.  
If his will were a catapult, that block of ice  
would have hit me square in the chest  
where I stood, immobile as the river, ready  
to take whatever came my way. Ready to be  
moral. Yet it was only right to see my brother  
slip with the massive ice in his arms, to see  
the block land on his chest, pinning him  
to the ice. I move forward, bending down to him  
to the ice. I find the strength to melt  
the glacier into a puddle. Together, we rise  
on our knees, seeing what we have achieved.

### WHAT'S ON THE LINE

With a dull ache at the neck's base and turn  
at the sight of cars, you begin to wonder  
whether you can afford to drive. The cost  
of nausea is rising and you have nowhere  
to go. Everything's reflection is what you  
never quite see. With a reversed red and blue  
chevron sign and double yellow arches  
everything's the same. You wait for the father  
to bring your children after the settled time.  
The price of gas is rising and you are  
not getting any taller. You are learning  
why sharing the precious can make you  
see everything in auras, even in rearview mirrors.  
The chevron, the arches, the vessels in the mass  
at the top of your spine pulse in time.  
You begin to feel your reach.

## FREEPORT, GRAND BAHAMA ISLAND

Consistent warm weather, calm waters—  
 but damn that sand will burn the feet.  
 The elixir such a clear true blue  
 when I remember it  
 I cry.

The calm waters—the cay  
 which surrounds us is why I think  
 (though, on the boat,  
 the tour guide from Texas never told us)  
 the waters remain so calm.  
 It is this protective area surrounding this  
 island that gets little deeper than ten feet.

This cay:  
 a womb without a mother.  
 This unreal paradise

“Darling, come here. You’d look lovely in braids.  
 Won’t you let me braid you?  
 Only \$3 a braid. Maybe later? Okay.  
 You say you’d rather go and dance the night away?”

We dance at Club 2000 in 2001.  
 Tony, the head lifeguard, told us to come here  
 to capture the true essence of Freeport.  
 We are here  
 and I wonder why.  
 We drink a little, dance a little,  
 confer with two brothers we have met.  
 Two brothers, one quiet, one not  
 Telling us what they live.  
 “How do you like my gun?” He lifts the tiny toy  
 dangling from his neck on a chain. “Guns are illegal here.”  
 I wonder why                      Chairs fly

The music moves me.

Forty-second screampdown taxi ride through town.  
We arrive somehow alive. We sleep

I wake with the sunrise.  
Where are the porpoises?  
I'd seen them in Virginia.  
Do they hunger in these waters?  
Water must be too shallow around this island.

I'm alone here—how can one sleep?  
The elixir so warm, so calm at the surface.  
I swim over black manta  
who does not mind my presence  
but if I were to step on him  
would be quick to return fire.  
Not entirely alone with manta  
around, our language  
our barrier reef.  
Will we ever fathom  
the depth of these waters?

"Are you ready today?"  
I will sit  
and she will stand  
when the sun is its highest  
her friend will come help  
we will talk about the murderous mother  
and of unforgiveness  
for the husband and doctor  
we will talk about their ten children  
(I will think of their long days  
and impregnable wills)  
their husbands who will  
get away with nothing.  
We will laugh together

as they rip out my brain  
my womb contracting.  
It moves me.

## BIRTHING WORDS

As quetzal feathers, beautiful is my song.  
 Look how my song bends down over the earth.  
 In the house of butterflies, my song is born.  
 —Aztec poem

Father works all day  
 to learn the nature of disease.  
 Symptoms. Diagnosis. Treatment.  
 He specializes in internal  
 medicine, not preventive medicine.

Father is very busy.  
 He must not be disturbed. He must  
 have absolute quiet. No friends allowed.  
 We must not knock on his door  
 unless we have an emergency.

In my corner near a window,  
 a crack in the vacuum, I breathe  
 best behind my desk, I write—  
 As quetzal sings, beautiful  
 is my song—over and over

and over in the silence, near  
 my window, hovers a hummingbird  
 too polite to knock. Or it's examining  
 its reflection, or me. Without the graceful fury  
 of those wings, the silent bird would fall

fast into its hunger.  
 Could it survive  
 on creatures that crawl?  
 Could it breathe without the wind from its wings?  
 Can my song be beautiful as quetzal sings?

THESIS ON CHEAP ENERGY

Fluorescence is obscene. There's a blasted banshee  
in the machine. A cheap way to enlightenment is no way.  
The buzzing will blockade the necessary way.  
The buzzing will stop those who listen from listening.

## MOUTH BREATHERS, NOTHING MATTERS

In the solitude summer brings, we swim  
cicada calls to bullfrog songs and float  
where ridgetops meet.

This blessed idleness may be the one gift  
no one envies. The memories I hold:  
Goya's grotesqueries, ocean's vomit  
premature remains—chewed to the dark song  
of an August night. Refusal, your Technicolor.

Coy dominance, your MGM musical. You  
breathe a synthetic dream into your right  
nostril, exhale your song, the left. They  
choked my common senses; I thought they  
were ready for show. But they did not matter.

The best of you died on television, after the hero  
meets the girl who was desperate to be seen  
above water. She asked, Do I exist? and he  
fell toward the hot studio lights.

You'd think an anaconda might have grabbed him  
on the banks. You'd think he'd have scaled  
the cliff she drifted. But when he hit the ground  
an ad landed on his face. He was on the rig next  
Wednesday, dancing numbers for the oilmen  
making tips on the side. Sometimes he sings  
while they rape the ocean, breathing heavily  
through his mouth.



## NO SWIMMING

No swimming here now.  
The water has become toxic  
from the bilge of passing barges,  
industrial waste and raw sewage  
from houseboats named *The Squat Pen*  
and *Ulysses* and I think, Those bastards  
have violated our childhood home: where I  
swam with minnows on five o'clock mornings  
and did pull-ups under the dock to spy cicada  
skeletons and dragonfly lovers who would take flight  
together in the noonday sun, so non-linear, not knowing  
where they were going, so attached to the moment. But  
who's to say the river was ours for the arrowheads and driftwood  
and islands I found?

## DOMINO EFFECTS

Some unknown kept us from leaving  
At our scheduled departure | "Arriving UFO" on the airway  
In the international airport lavatory | was compensation for the waste  
We felt for having rushed  
In the flood of wanderers.

Whoever you are  
You led me to the shade of the banyan trees  
To burn my corneas, tracing and retracing  
The motion of their twisted cords, to lose  
The foreign brew in my brain.

She lay on the shoots, blind, still drunk  
From the night that could never have passed  
So quickly | thinking the shoots should grow into her  
So they might infuse | the wetness  
Was leaving like the stranger | she knew better than herself.

Where are we going?  
The men will show us | they make a game  
Of what we need to know. They already know  
This is their home. We aliens  
White rectangles with black dots | dry bones and burn scars.

DADA IS MMM . . .

A spontaneous work of art,  
Dada, I make you  
What you already are—  
To what you amount,  
To what you know.

Moments like this last  
In the collective pool  
The dark matter of our race:  
Present in its absence.

I drop you, Dada,  
And the rest:  
To sweep would be to smear.  
So I flush

Minute  
Inane  
Absurd, you  
And what you know

You and your sorrow  
Down your pale throne  
Down your dark tunnel  
Down your easy road.

## FERLINGHETTI DID THIS

A trapeze act  
is one  
in that  
the risk is high  
while the one  
taking risk makes  
the feat look easy.  
Done with hours  
of practice  
each day  
practicing  
for years  
to accomplish  
what seems  
unaccomplishable.

I may  
(run away  
to) join the circus.

## TELL ME, PAIN

Tell me pain is not injury or invoker  
when I see it moving inward with the waning of the lune.  
There was disregard for a word, a treading upon an honor.  
Nothing is ours that we cannot spend.  
The kiss is the spin.  
Nothing is mine that you cannot reach  
after dipping into my crescent dream of water.  
Silence leaches: the body of soul.  
Penance: ingress to expense.

## AFTER THE ICE STORM

A window reveals the icy limbs  
In discourse with disturbing winds:  
Warning of a potential fall  
Breakage of those brittle limbs.

She wants to generate heat  
Without violating the season.  
She wants more than heat  
For every season. A geometric transparency,  
An exchange of visions.

What can she say to a tree  
In pain? Will a maypole dance  
In arctic climate thaw the soil and save it:  
Hope for future talks and fertility dances?

## AN END

I've been married  
to the summer  
since I began  
to love the water.  
We've been together for 24 years.  
Summer and I separated in March.  
The water and I are left  
to stare at each other.  
We can only perceive  
the eddies and waves  
that will soon pass.  
But our senses sharpen  
and together we slit my throat.  
Now when I kiss the still water  
it returns to its solitary place.  
I will join it in the passing of my time.

## II. What We Know



## WITHIN THIS RHYTHM

To be listening  
to the music  
at this moment  
for the first time  
since ancient time  
since before  
the call of war  
is proof that pain  
is a collection  
pulsing to the  
syncopated beatings:  
rhythms we move  
but will never hold.

## WITHOUT THE OASIS WITHIN

Expatriate in his own backyard.

“Where do I plant the garden?”

“Where do I hang my hammock?”

“Which way is east?”

Inside humor in his writing outside  
the boundary of truth.

Your place of origin

a point of reference

but not a measure of worth.

“Meaningless! Meaningless!”

can be a guiding way

directions to the oasis—

we all at some point

thirst.

WHAT WE WANT, OR WHAT WE GET

Mercury is the early morning sky that finds  
us with no thoughts of darkness.

We believe in stretching points of light.

We know no limits for we know nothing and  
sleep is the romance of nothingness  
treading the horizon of dreams.

Water is everything we cannot be.

## WHAT WE WANT, OR WHAT WE GET II

Rubbing my forehead did nothing for me.  
You were eager to make that mistake  
for company and regret. I regret  
having had that faith. When I was called  
an atheist in American literature class  
I almost kissed the ground with laughter.  
When people stretch my skin like that  
I want to swallow the apostate and be sorry later.  
My head is a big stone gap without a family name: lost  
in the idea of itself, the image of itself.  
You can kiss the mouth of god and complain  
about the stubble or you can continue  
to breathe through your nose. He might say,  
I'm tearing up your face.  
Segues get me sometimes, so I did not stop him  
when he carried me to bed.

## CAMPING

This body never seemed to be mine  
until I was with him and even then  
this body she felt through his hands  
as something worthy of holding—  
at least as a sleeping bag in the cold.  
What do the Blue Ridge Mountains know?  
Snow, wind, rain, erosion.  
Erosion and the manipulation of demigods  
the howling of demidogs—they will not change.

WHAT WE SEEK, OR WHAT WE FIND

Remember the time you found yourself  
pressing knees into frozen patio  
piercing silent ground into screaming  
for little things that break with one precise blow.

## GUIDE TO GETTING THERE ALIVE

Primal rhythms pulse in the heart of my sleep sending news of war in code.  
If only the rhythms were mine to keep, the vicious cycle would die with me.  
Nothing is ours.  
Ownership is mythic as capitalism to Amazon women.  
If I awaken before this dream becomes another's  
perhaps the code will crack over my capitalist head and bid the rhythms return.

## WHAT YOU DO WHEN YOU GET THERE

You come to love  
what you find still in water.  
You turn  
your back on a waxing shadow  
the unseeable of your moon.  
See destruction's penumbra.  
Know that nothing matters.  
When you touch me I know  
nothing else matters  
when I'm feeling what I'll never hold.



WHAT WE KNOW, OR WHAT WE LEARN

A prophet's poetic puns brilliantly resound:  
the catalog extends, the metaphors abound  
analogies arise rhetorical questions  
to which no answers must be found.

### III. Field Guide to the Night Sky

ANTIPODAL LUNE

Celestine providence lights / the fire, kindles the eros, / drives toward god.

## SUMMER GLANCES

Astronomy says calculations are amiss.  
Philosophy says believe in doubt  
yet its stone vibrates  
alchemy in glances  
to me.

Middle ages—more myth than truth.  
Commitments—more broken than binding.  
Yet spring stars are arriving  
in western hemisphere  
our planets are aligning  
close to the moon:  
our last  
chance to see  
this century  
is in the start of June.

#### PLATE TECTONICS

The shapes merged with warm color, light refracting from multidimensional points.

How long has the blatant observance of physical and spiritual laws persisted  
Despite the wishes of stamp collectors? St. Francis was in ecstasy  
To feel warm color within himself, even during mass  
Assaults in private rooms with square layouts and circular reasoning  
Revolving a couple of degrees around broken lights. The shapes made  
A supercontinent for nondenominational sensualists who collect methods of self-  
Preservation older than Pangaea.

LOOKING FOR THE BIG BANG

after Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* and the shuttle *Columbia*

They will not call it an explosion:  
these deaths in our atmosphere.

The starship troopers were moving  
in the midst of their stasis, restraining  
belts holding them firm to backbone-  
friendly chairs, their minds telling  
them not to fear. They did not design  
the vessel of flight, the oldest  
one which could take them so far.  
Breaking apart is how they refer  
to the accident,

assuming one believes in a breaking  
apart instead of a movement away from  
*eine Interessengemeinschaft*. This  
fellowship of interest keeps calling us  
away from the regular programming

for instance, at nine o'clock (21:00 hours)  
EST, 28 January 2003, on all the major  
networks (for one hour), when we were  
told what we needed to know, we know  
we have our own IGs, never independent  
never free, forever in response to others'  
IGs. A Slothropian conditioning stimulus  
or paranoia? The troopers had their own  
star points to cross. Yes. Their own holy

wars, needs to move away from this world  
when  
returning can only yield death:  
a forever clinging to and letting go—  
this fellowship of interests.

We continue to make love despite it all.  
We persevere only to move toward a  
more certain means to an end. Of war  
we cannot understand—how we can  
shift from parabolic to vertical movement  
without killing us all. Sublunaries

we will become sublime. And, certain for all  
we will live or die.

*eine Interessengemeinschaft*: German for “fellowship of interest,” to what “IG” refers in this poem—terms which are both repeatedly used in *GR*

## FREEDOM MOVEMENT

You know what freedom is  
while  
you sit on a lounge chair  
strategically placed  
in the hotel parking lot. With a fix  
to keep you focused, a buzz  
to keep you calm, you envision  
though your eyes are seeing  
revelatory spheres  
exploding spheres  
luminous spheres.  
You wonder  
what keeps this sphere going 'round  
while  
you sit on a lounge chair  
with a fix and a buzz so  
you don't jump at the noise  
and cling to some one  
like the youth next to you.



#### IV. Dance or Fly

## NEXT SPRING: A HEALTHY BLOSSOM?

Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.  
A couple of cold nights sent them in flight:  
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?

Spring came early in '94 to regenerate  
White blossoms, concealing wounds: absence is bathed in light with  
Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.

The sun cannot resurrect what has been chilled erect.  
Shadows under broken petals are consumed by night.  
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?

Useless involucre, even now, what good are you  
When you failed to protect your children from the harms of frozen dew?  
Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.

Evolution is dependent upon you  
To develop yourselves to see your children through.  
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?

Though vulnerable in appearance, the petals are just like you.  
Why won't they thrive under mutable skies?  
I mourn and celebrate for them making me love you.  
Only the beginning of spring, and dogwood blooms have died.

## THESES OF AN ESSAY ON A CANVAS

Appalachian Leda knows the *différance*  
between mimesis and verisimilitude.  
Making her discovery between blue jean  
washings, she spots that deceptive bird  
approaching—her laundry  
sodden from the incoming flight.  
Pastel images  
professional thinkers suspend  
in conspicuous places.

## ESSAY ON A CANVAS

I will put on my silk teal shirt  
and bring out the canvas. I will separate  
sea greens and peacock blues from the blackness  
think of your fingers and corporate lawyers. They all fit.  
They bark of nipples in harmony. They stand  
me at the stove, portfolio at hand. My pen and your fingers still  
move as heat around the element—gyraling to the inside. Standing  
here, my face burns.

Midwestern, urban and Appalachian  
Ledas have much in common.  
They beg  
to be fucked in various ways. You'd be amazed  
how much they know. Biblical  
or secular makes no différence. Phallicly  
speaking, I love your fingers. I hold what I love  
in my mouth: you are so under-the-tongue.  
Subliminal? I joked that this forum was not  
meant for ego-boosting, but you could not  
hear me. Oh, your face is still lovely, even  
with the extra weight and discrepant hair.  
I fear nothing but refuse.  
Who is your favorite Leda? What *is* your criterion.  
What she does for you is not a mystery.  
You slip  
inside yourself. Vulnerable is a pointed staple  
on your tongue. Do you stand erect when you come?

## WAITING FOR THE END

I am waiting for this period of involuntary mortification to end.

I am waiting for the self-haters to stop seeking me out.

I am waiting for the narcissists to stop looking to me.

I am waiting for the box to drop from the sky, its parachute  
following the way to my toes—ending my wait  
with a bang, while I begin waiting to see a light  
at the bottom of the box, but can't be, 'cause  
the parachute has landed on my head.

I am waiting for the taste of your skin again, as I wait for the kiss  
of sleep.

I am waiting for a reason to believe again: that your taste supercedes  
the skin.

I am waiting to supercede  
waiting.

MOVING STATUES OF LIBERTY  
after Lucille Clifton

these hips are my hips  
monuments of no passive  
resistance. they uphold  
affirmative resistance, lovely  
symmetry. they fit into vital  
places where mutual liberty  
is key anatomy. these hips  
are your hips ambiguous as  
they seem to be, tempestuous  
as our physiology. we move  
our hips in tormented time  
to the time after resistance  
that cannot be forgotten.  
sometimes we'd rather forget  
our hips oppose our extremities;  
yet you touched my hips  
moving me.

V. Sink or Sing

## MY CHILDREN LAUGHING

I lie on the asphalt and wait for it to come  
At this sunny moment with dusk rushing in  
The warm breeze of wise children  
Laughing at the curls lapping at my mouth, moving  
A universe in blades of grass.  
The distance of my gaze lays me on bituminous beds  
Searching for broken universes.  
Once I was wise and laughed at my mother  
For being beautiful, for letting me pick all the dandelions, for  
Telling me to stay off the circular road.



## HARMONY

She is much taller than  
I was when I was almost  
ten. Her frame is slender;  
her hair is the color of honey.  
She avoids trouble.  
I was never a girl like Harmony.  
She finds nothing uncanny about  
dolls. She used to ask me to give her  
nothing besides them. She never asks  
for anything, really. She's determined  
to make something of herself.  
She doesn't want to be  
like me. She has a different laugh  
for every occasion, writes  
with her left hand. She can hear  
before my voice sings or cries  
her name. She is connected to me.  
She balances her center—walks  
the curb—and never falls. If she does  
the grass will catch her while I'm there.  
Glasses slide down my nose and  
I hope she will notice. Before I can look  
her way, she's smiling and teasing me.  
Sometimes I like not being able to see.  
Do I look better without my glasses  
Harmony? Looks like a part of  
your face is missing. She is  
laughing. She's serious.  
She is still a part of me.

## FOUR-YEAR-OLD SON SEES "THE SEAFARER"

Water falls  
beyond the bleeding serpent.  
The wall-eyed pike sees  
his next meal before him.  
The walrus looks back  
into the night. The sailor sees  
nothing. Mommy, the sailor  
has no eyes.

He points to the Klee print.  
I want to be an artist, Mommy.  
One thunderous July night I saw  
you, Trevor—with sparklers you  
made the moon. He says, But I can't  
draw like that, Mommy.

## VALUING STATUES, OR WHAT FALLS FROM THE SKY

Children, tell me how to make love  
leave my mind.  
Will you teach me the art  
of transcendence or obedience  
in playful talk  
as we drive to the center of the state?  
I've been working to unlearn much  
of everything.  
Maybe I will teach you something  
while I soak in the rain  
so I may or may not be impressed  
by people with umbrellas or manners.  
The rain is cold, a wet cold, and I am  
remembering my appraisal of the drops  
on my three-year-old tongue. They were  
the kisses never returned  
when I would walk through the cemetery  
during some cruel month  
to find bagworms in trees  
and to climb stacked circles  
that became smaller as I climbed higher  
until I reached the statue of Him.  
I would embrace Him and kiss His hand  
thinking only of how much  
He looked like my father.  
In your clinging arms  
with your smooth damp cheeks  
pressed to mine  
I am learning why a world religion follows  
a child with an obscure father.