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Columbia Poetry Review

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# Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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no. 26

columbiapoetryreview

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*Columbia Poetry Review* is published in the spring of each year by the Department of English, Columbia College Chicago, 600 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois, 60605.

## **SUBMISSIONS**

Our reading period extends from August 1 to November 30. Please send up to 5 pages of poetry (one poem per page) during our reading period to the above address. We do not accept e-mail submissions. We respond by February. Please supply a SASE for reply only. Submissions will not be returned.

## **PURCHASE INFORMATION**

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## **WEBSITE INFORMATION**

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# What We Have Lost

We left them in little silver factories, our breathings, and continued on  
as things unliving and for a short while, as trees.

And when we gathered  
on the church steps we knew we'd be human again, as confirmed by our  
drinkings, but missed the wrapped leaves and so swerved  
toward the bathtub

and were, for a day, droplings of bath water and tiny blond hairs. Imagine  
it harder, our hybrid selves: both dirty and divine. Everything is  
a question of

belief: we began as bone bits and once we tired, we began again  
as a two-lover herd. That time I was a real woman I yearned for your square  
back of wanting, your yellowsun gut.

We are a thousand different shapes before we are the shapes we die in. If there  
is a map for grief, it has already lost its world. Soon it will be a shower curtain  
or blueprint. Soon we'll be burning

it for warmth. I could love you more easily as a pale bird, circling you with air.  
I would love you a lot more if you weren't so alive. We will always need  
things to teach us leaving;

there are a million kinds of loss. Each one has to do with breathing  
and not breathing.

# At Least There Are Windmills

Torso of sand

Birdglow blue dress

The morning is unpolished and dizzy

Blooming into a face

We give ourselves no refuge from ourselves

At least there is rice milk

At least there are windmills

Asleep on the sea

There is a chance to hold bravery in my mouth

I pass through white corridors of music

I ride trains to and from airports

Bill Clinton emails me pretending to ask for help

It is a total human thing

To try

To make constellations on each other's bodies

We must discover each other's bodies

I imagine there is hope

Intangible and trembling

I'm going to go lay on the beach

Try to make some kind of difference

With my sovereign dreams

I want you to touch me first



---

# Folklore

I once walked  
on the town's periphery            looking in  
like a matchstick girl  
a girl made of sticks

I walked the edge of our suburb  
to find    a warm window

*was it there*  
it wasn't

I'm still looking  
plush as hunger

# Stopgap Sex Act

Into someone else's struggle

No one's a suffragette      It's an obsolete technology

Intent on tape delay      If you don't have a hard drive

That's ok

Pass around source notes like a joint

Beautiful and fulfilled

Obviously high

Down with the contemporary dimension

An adult doesn't court on an empty stomach

An adult doesn't facefuck on an empty stomach

What do you call that game

*You flinched*

Snow bank

Delivery room

A place the mind can go alone

Cover up gaps in memory with a joke

Adults have relationships

Nice work

Blank or just muted

My name

I don't entertain

If you came here for a story

Put this in your mouth

Count backward from a hundred

# Fashion Blast Quarter

Young film comes again

Color the image away

It mutes love

This color gets thought

It mentions hours

Absent the sapphire

All the wet birds and webs

Blackout anomaly

Away tundra, away marble

Her conversation foregrounded

It's private

She found your drawing

Next spring the supplicants can

learn to tell time

Practice on her

Clothes communicate themselves

The gum of a shell

What is that

Get selection

Get lungs

A small example

Returns are growing

You mentioned *aspire*

Bring me

sparkling wishes

the Playboy jet

a whole universal and hovering body

*from Ok, Apollinarius*

+++

Say that the body is a pink bonnet trampled by gulls on the rocks above the Adriatic. That a moth flies into it & is blown where the bonnet is blown. That a pilgrim hears the silence inside the bonnet, & it is the silence of the plastic solar system that hung above his crib as an infant. He tastes a ripe pear for the first time, & the juice runs through his beard. He goes out with the multitudes huddled before the frozen temples to Apollo & there, under the vacancies between the worlds, plays his half-sized guitar. Elsewhere, another man lays his head on the soft breast of a woman he can't even pretend to love, & she whispers to him: when you look through the emptiness inside an atom, you see the body & the soul as two well-dressed men, seated, staring blankly, hands folded under their arms, & a gun on the desk between them.

# The Death of Nikola Tesla

When Nikola Tesla died, a little light went out from his groin. Sparrows pulled apart from his dead belly to reveal nomadic paths of bees, all alight with the northern lights repeating themselves on journeys from Namibia to Brazil. Telegrams poured in from the four corners of grief: Buffalo Bill proclaimed from his grave that this is what happens when you kill the cow before the bull; César Vallejo copied *Tesla* over and over again into the skin of five notebooks, in the script of three different hands; Admiral Peary and roustabout Cook said the feud was finally over, that there never really was a North Pole to dispute anyway; and Edison wept near his recorder, nearly electrocuting himself on the magnetic pull of the frayed cord. The good people of Colorado Springs, where Tesla had lived, gathered in black on a rare day of rain and feared the light might one day even go out of their religion. The indigenous tribes of Cheyenne Mountain journeyed to Pikes Peak to try to capture afternoon lightning, though they knew the Peak by names less certain of posterity. Nocturnal animals shifted from *possums* to *opossums*, *stink-badgers* to *skunks*, blaming rogue sparks of moonlight in the not-yet-buried sun for their confused callings. *Tesla had died as he had died*, the barn owl hooted all light long. *He will live, now, also as he has died*. Nikolai and Pavlo and Yuri left the saloon and wondered why lamps in their mining hats had dimmed. Why their words were somehow stuck in their throats, even after shots of whiskey and a beer back. The poets spoke in the strange way poets speak: Karl Marx proclaimed, *Death is the opiate of the people*; John Bradley responded, *Rain pours through rain even when it rains*; Joe Gastiger guarded the grave and kept calling everyone *Darling* in the most adorable way; and Vallejo—Vallejo said nothing, fingering, instead, the outline of his skeleton through a suit coat that had grown too large, a skeleton he had washed every day, that somehow in Tesla's death glowed in Paris or Peru with the auroras boreales of a life well-deathed.

# Amnesia of the Hardboiled Detective Novel

*for James Crumley, 1939–2008*

*Crumley was long gone when I got there. Only the alcohol fumes remained, and the stories. I knew John must be right. I could smell kerosene on my red flannel plaid. Later that afternoon, the redhead strolled into my office with a pair of legs. I was not her elder and she was not my dream. Honestly, if it hadn't been for the autopsy, I would never have looked in the mirror. I kept searching for lost parts of myself I'd implanted, through thousands of fantasies, into the bodies of women I barely knew. I much preferred Celtic sea salt to sprinkling my food with sea lice. They'd leave a trail of too much desire for the oceanic carvings of the flesh. Crumley's characters answer the wrong milk of life. I kept trying to write myself out of my past. Sure, I adored breasts. Yes, my parents' divorce bit my wrist. So that afternoon when the redhead wore that tight white top and crossed her mysterious hose, I gravitated toward the gray of her blazer. It was neither black nor white. It was not something to be solved. Nothing would be the death of me. I knew danger when I saw my face in the mirror. In those days everything was a window. I was like one of those starlings battling myself in the freshly watered glass. *I was long gone when I got to the world. Only their perfume from former lives remained, and the glory.* I knew John must be right. That's the way it is with karma. We drag our past back through the future we hope to make alert. I knew I must be wrong. I could count on it as surely as I could bleed. I could smell owl resin on my wrist. I'd flown too many missions across the cloud-embittered moon. Sliced this life away and that. I'd searched for mice in all the wrong novels. I was convinced that crushed bone might make me wrong if I ate the nervous twitch. So I went to the other office where the clients came with crime. I carried a .38 that was really a book and wore a hat. I started not to drink, thought better of it, and returned to cranberries and cane syrup. Some sweetness in life had been missing fifty-six years. Some poem. I'd too long left it in the bush, with the burning bees and entrails of musk-ox. I'd too long left it in the gorgeous forest between her thighs. Crumley's characters were Montana-hard. Often on the lam on the Yellowstone River or North Boulder. I kept allying myself with Indiana and Colorado. I believed the border of everything offered the possibility of retreat. So much more of me kept sinking into the left side of everything.*

So many times my left hand wrote with my right. Like when I took to lying on the sidewalk crack to seek balance, measure whether my back was in perfect sway. Yes, I adored her breasts. So for seventeen minutes that afternoon, I was not her father and she was not my horse. *Crumley was long gone when I got there? No, Crumley was long wrong when I arrived. Only desire remained, and the horny.* John told me so when he spoke of fumes. Of the kerosene rag stuffed in my chest. Of the hole that had once been my heart. Smoke lingering off the cigarette of Bogie or Bacall. The grainy reach of my black and white 114-minute past. *I'd say Crumley is the heir apparent to Raymond Chandler.* The review was true. How all things resolve, though originally confuse. How the actors remain beautiful youth. How we wake from the big sleep of our past into who we do.





Because you loved her too, told me  
 so  
 as you kissed me goodbye  
 kissed my lip  
 as I held her to say so long to you  
 that last time  
 You touched her hair,  
 petted her black beagle body, her sweet beagle ear  
 held it in your hand the last you said the time  
 saying, *Barney's a good girl* such a good  
*dog* That name  
 the gift the gender bend the signature of love  
 the halo hunt of my secret glorious hound self  
 through which my breathing  
 bends and blurs and breathes still and always  
 will  
 and begs to  
 be  
 a word started a word broken but begun into three

# Sundial

& scattered in the sleep past dreamt am seen in wind oh that same again  
sun under earth slick spill comes toward  
fishes & birds  
can be listed  
past sleep & put asunder in the nesting season

Out the window it looks fine Yahara River is a river  
meeting up with Lake Mendota  
men & bicycles women & boats hello leigh hunt and leif and laynie  
in a century with may in it 2010

May not intend it  
to be out of joint and oh again that again earth under earth  
altering  
One toad pops up in the shade—fat toad—cools down

\*

the yellow and purple lupine & paintbrush mt. st. helens  
cousin helena solar nostril for the left breath or vice versa  
in the workshop on breathing the workshop on resting the workshop on yoking  
Yolanda's mother had a book called *The Sensuous Woman* on licking  
we didn't have a lot to say

If A builds a strawbale house it will be round and  
Mary and I were fastest in the three-legged race now move along desire  
out of that sound  
pattern as parents as parts

toward midnight not sleeping    what's the house called in your brain  
remember house    theater    dial of sun the ground's a bed for  
plain way the shadow indicates    calendaric  
a present!  
from aunt ruth in san francisco    california    why golden  
what day

---

# # 89

The term *decorative* to denote what is not useful or essential: the under driver's seat decorated by empty plastic bottle. "The sky takes the attributes of what fills it": raindrops, planes, misquotes, mosquitos, fireworks. These are not sky. "The sky takes the attributes of what fills it":  $O_2$ ,  $N_2$ , scattered 460 nm light, condensed water vapor—we choose to see the sky with particular cones sensitive to light we call *visible*. This is not the sky.

Suppose we trade a pair of funhouse glasses for another: your decorative chest affixed to a jacket, your decorative hips to a skirt; your decorative dresser affixed by one of its eight vertices to your panties, laundered and unworn. What do we gain by changing reference frames? If I apprehend you only via implements dumbly fashioned for the purpose of heating my food, I want to be aware of the irregularities in the lenses used.

# Movies in Childhood

Through my drugged blur, post-op,  
at eleven years old,  
I thought Ben-Hur's  
horses literally wept.  
A nurse punctured my thigh  
with three needles  
in the middle of the night.  
Most of the pain  
was new. From the hospital  
bed, I saw, too, an abandoned  
teenager living behind walls  
while another family  
moved in. One spoke  
of sunlight painted  
a bedroom's wood floor  
as the season turned.  
Then his eye poured  
through, darkened  
his carved peephole  
as a girl dressed.  
In another, bells  
attached to jacket lapels  
hung still as the villain,  
unblinking, practiced  
picking a wallet.  
Siphoned billfolds  
passed between newspaper  
tubes by the team,  
theft which started  
with an elbow, a sharp bump

on a bright, busy city street.  
In *Papillon*, McQueen  
jumped from Devil's Island,  
a leap that should have killed him.  
He ate roaches in solitary,  
the insect clicking just beyond  
his twitching fingertips.  
How did you know  
I wasn't contagious?  
the leper asked, after McQueen  
accepted his pipe. Puffing,  
he said, I didn't. I almost  
forgot my own sutures  
until the needle bit  
into his chest over  
and over to paint  
the butterfly. In the fire's  
red light, the man's face  
appeared to crack and melt.  
Underneath his eyes, small holes  
rotted out. A fellow prisoner ran  
into a trap, spikes tore  
clean through, out his back  
as he seemed to pray,  
eyes exploding skyward.

# You Dumb Fuck

## *An Elegy*

We might think you held two .45  
calibers and wore your own Stetson,

except your empty hands lost  
aim and your hair, held in handkerchief,

dangles like grass the cardinal  
flies with to its shaded nook.

We didn't clear the misery for you,  
and this arrives as all language,

afterwards and postscript, nothing  
letters could touch. Maybe

you knew some of us would love  
your ghost—your arms swimming

inside your shirt and your mind  
nearly tethered to the future

until 4 pm shadows darkened  
one final comfort, a beaded sling  
that held all of you up, hunted.

from The Blank Target

[XXVIII]

*How Long Do I Have to Lick You Until You Feel Like Cuddling*

You'll never untaste the salt with all that water in your lungs

I should have told you nothing tastes like you

Don't forget a return address label when mailing anything to heaven or hell

What can god hear if I pray with my eyes open

Your bruises would be perfect without me & my bruises would still linger blues &  
yellows in your eyes

Convince me that I deserve the meaning of any word

When I gave you a kite I was the one who flew it

Maybe I am a sex toy but I still deserve a heartbeat

I wish I had left your hair & bones & eyes exactly where I could find them

## [XXXI]

*Sometimes I Think I Hear Hoofsteps on the Roof*

Though I never hear anything that sounds like a horse except horses

That's when I get dirty & you get even dirtier

This is not a confessional poem mother fucker

it's a collection of facts

I don't prefer laces or straps

or water in lungs

I have a fear that reading out loud will change me

I'll start tasting salt when I breathe

The best part about me is that I don't have to see you naked to see me naked

& if I had a bigger mouth I would hide both our tongues

---

# Our Suits Lack Microphones

A shark rips my father  
from his casket

and swims to Missouri.  
The doctors turn him on.

We find buttons  
that make his legs

twitch. We clip  
barrettes in his hair

and complain about  
his DVD selection.

Everyone sees God  
in his face but me.

Mother detaches tubes.  
I gunfire the machines.

# Head

1

You just feel wrong  
so you convert

one neutron  
to a proton,

emit beta radiation.

2

You try  
not to squirm,

to cancel  
yourself out,

still, in dreams  
you narrate

each discharge  
in the first person.

3

As if you were  
banging your head

on every beach  
in frustration

---

# End User

What do I have to say  
to myself?

My user-name  
is invalid.

\*

Pain concentrates:

a continuous signal  
that consumes  
the receiver.

\*

The belief that nature  
is God's speech:

small tomato  
cysts

appear

on shingle twigs  
under bow-tie leaves.

\*

So when water  
or shadows

are going over  
“the same ground?”

\*

“Made any money though?”  
one asks

and both  
laugh loudly.

---

# Houses

What's lacking  
in the film version?

Worry bead lists,  
descriptions

of imaginary feudal  
sigils.

\*

Someone says it's an ugly  
universe with its

37 families  
of sub-atomic particles.

Sums should be evenly  
divisible.

\*

Platonic forms:

floors and hallways  
built of living

ants

# Episodes

1

Two children travel to Australia  
in an instant  
with the aid of a magical dog,  
really a witch,  
and a book on the animals  
of the outback  
which race past—  
as soon as the kids appear—  
followed by predators  
that the boy and girl  
can name.

2

Hot comedy: *God of Carnage*.

Having trouble viewing this?

3

In the opener,  
a ramified tube

speaks  
of itself, to itself,

saying, "Not bad."

---

# The New Zombie

1

I stare at a faint  
spinning disc

in the black  
endlessly

ready to pounce.

2

I actually say,

"I'm so sick  
of zombies!"

3

Viral relics  
in the genome?

Genes that switch  
themselves off

and on,

unthinking  
but coordinated?

4

Zombie surfeit.

Half-off zombie

The best zombie  
imitation.

Invisible zombie  
hand

---

## Airport Poem (twitter sonnet)

A man felt me up and then I got into a silver tube.

I'm reading a book where people fall elaborately in love and everybody dies.

On a plane once I read *Cannery Row*, one of the few books I've read twice.

I've read *Jesus' Son* tens of times but never on a plane.

It's too good for that.

A book about land, being on it, and trying not to get erased from it.

At an art show the artist did a presentation on the Third Throne.

The artwork not the book.

He should have left well enough alone, but did a pseudo-religious performance anyway.

His videos were good, though.

I read *East of Eden* on a plane.

I prefer science fiction now because I'm worried about what's going to happen to us.

At the counter we got breakfast and the total was twenty thirteen.

The year we'll have a baby, I said.

# When it's her turn

she tells me what to do with her body.

They say parenthood means we must do this  
and get it on paper, and have it notarized  
and maybe a lawyer should be involved.

We're looking into it. She breezes through

life support, DNR, feeding tubes, stresses  
that they should take anything useful—  
*Even eyes? Even eyes.*—and sew her shut.  
Her flannel pajamas are crazy with tiny umbrellas.  
I picture sutures beneath them, running up

like a zipper, teeth caught on the skin  
between her breasts. I confess, it was her body  
in a bar that drew me to this breakfast nook,  
the mortgage that has us underwater, the baby  
daughter who swam inside her, whose skin,

they've told us, insists on her touch.

That she doesn't want a church, she admits,  
will be a bone in the throat of the family.

Not for her mother, maybe, but her father.

She asks that I care for her here, wants

*sufficient medication* for pain. Her words  
are an ax behind glass, the water we've stashed  
for disaster. I picture myself with her body  
in a strange room without her. Ashes, she says,  
and people should pray if they want to.

---

# Overcoding Class, Version 2

I never wanted to always divide things—the idea

not to be frightened. I mean that she is you

because I imagine her silk as pink, something I would never—inside that desire

wrong touch, impending—

and so she attempted to steer me clear, wear as good as possible clothes and cover your—

even though the living room, contracting.

How she runs to be more—she runs to be more—if I am she, I am saying good-bye—

in light yellow.

That every neglected space is a—

Barracks? Or apartment, with concrete upon which veins might look nice

but not good for stability. I meant vines. Which factory?

A feeling that there is nothing wrong. All might certainly blow away.

Cotton. History. Tools. This photo of her hands.

Restated: how I want to be with my mother, so basic—full paycheck—so no moment  
stands exactly right.

I was saying—

Light yellow living then—living the then now

and when—light yellow seven times, unfolds, puts trying on and off

and she made eight, quiet. Some pennies, glossy.

Full trees—grey rock—three geese above, their movement across creates

a composition to remember

but I always go back inside, again to the pale of different lives and the snap

of surgical gloves. Paid for.

Having—between large pines. An experience, a conference. Read: pins.

Leftover smokestack. The prick of care. How would it taste? A tower yard?

My poverty broadcasts, so vertical, not in this beauty way.

I begin to count:

Who do not have branches.

Worry: what are you doing with words and how much will it cost—

“Take that and I did.”

It starts and starts. How lily pads. Sweetness. Compare.

A brother starts and stops a sister. While you have never been underneath

such a relationship, to gate the occasional fear which has no object.

I will not. Vacation

property.

At the steps of a church. Go up—

knees angled difficultly.

A life is not to simplify,

to delete your grandmother. She said you might, because after all, who makes a project

about where they are from?

Answer: whoever makes daily such a claim against neutral.

I walked into an unfinished waiting room.

I remembered its furniture but did not call it missing.

Inside its empty, poverty, I expand: there is more than one way to not care

about local education, redlining, or a soldier's duty. Spackle it. As permanent.

The honor. Past many tries. The past is many tired

as I go

forward. Then I felt luxury and no focus, being sponsored.

Followed by the roll of a joke to lift the weather, to lift the question: what can you do?

I am this conversation.

Vectors forward. But you loved him last night. His rolling handsome. His, the same  
so never looked at your lack—

A top cloud makes a gentle slope. Top grass hides hard work, to string out  
the clothes or secret. Duck under what cover. We. She said

“I hope your trip south goes well.”

I hope your trip goes south well.

# *Sobresaturada*

Here we go  
again

the clouds

are rolling

in

\*

You say you  
are overwhelmed

and repeat it  
in Spanish.

Some things  
can't be said

enough.

\*

"In the month of April,  
one thousand waters,"

or so

they say

in Spanish

and in Catalan.

\*

We mistook a moto  
for the wind

continuing  
to tremble

in the sheets

of rain

in the storm.

# Lines Composed in a Crater

I

You cradle the meteorites  
that fall beside your feet.

I wonder why  
the sky would throw such things.

My bones rattle cold  
when we count wrinkles in the moon.

II

I am floating farther away  
from your warmth.

When I orbit you,  
I no longer scorch at the edges.

They will say of you:  
*She once contained life.*

They will say of me:  
*Data inconclusive.*

---

# Earth, Pshh.

I close my eyes and imagine sunset,  
painted tangerine and plum  
rotting into night.

The sky nothing  
but miles of asphalt, we don't need  
pedestrian things

like dusk or dawn.  
Here, we are earth's  
beacon, we rise

the tides, we are mother  
nature, gravity  
locked-in. Here,

great lakes are filled  
with basalts, lava leftovers,  
fancier than freshwater

and fish. We can swim  
in space if we  
really want to.

We are closer  
to the sun  
sometimes.

# Room

I will not let light slant  
over my unmeasured  
corners, abandoned by  
butchers who spare

not one single lamb;  
nor will the bookshelves  
presume, will I call upon  
Pound, Pepys, Margaret

Atwood or Homer, the  
wide jars of words, wet  
seed pods of pleasure—  
not while time ticks

its perfume, whiter  
than blue, and there's  
air here, and room,  
night prompting

these haphazard  
glimpses of you.

# Iris, Christmas Eve

I watch the DVD delivery boy bump away down my cobblestone street until I can no longer see the particular outline of his broad, sad shoulders, warm with tenderness for all shoulders and shoulder muscles, my favorite part of the body to watch in motion—that simple action of reaching, which begins, as I tell my students, *as an act of the imagination, at least according to Aristotle, Air is what, Aristotle, a philosopher, someone who thinks a lot, and uses his imagination even more.* I imagine Iris waiting for me inside with a pot of Lady Grey, the ceramic mugs we made at the pottery place. I can see clearly the gully around her clavicles, her strong shoulders, the long line of her graceful neck and that navy blue Adidas tee she wears around the house, vintage like everything she owns, the white logo large on her back, the rest of the shirt verging toward transparent, indecent, and I wish I could see her in it now, feel her holding me holding onto her, the assurance of her strength rising up and settling around us both. I turn to face my empty home, quiet and dark but for the twinkling tree and Christmas candles in the windows, the embers of my fading fire, and I remember last time she was in town, Thanksgiving, and how we hardly slept that weekend. It was raining and the waves were roaring,

we had the windows cracked to hear, fat drops splattered loud and hard on the porch boards. Early Sunday morning, lying on a shaggy rug together on the floor in front of the fire, in thick wool socks and our robes, we pretended we were young again and watched *WALL-E*. I made blueberry oatmeal waffles, my favorite rainy morning food, served with strawberries and clotted cream, the crisp crunch of the oatmeal in each chewy mouthful, the way the blueberries pop in the heat of cooking and nearly caramelize, the smoothness of the clotted cream and the perfect tart and cold of fresh-washed strawberries at the finish. Mango mimosas in our mismatched juice glasses, black coffee for Iris and with cream for me in tiny gold-rimmed tea cups, the French press and a cow-shaped creamer and our dirty plates on a tray on the hearth at our feet, the darkness of that early morning in the rain and the silly sounds from the talking robots on TV. After Iris ate, she slept, her head in my lap, my fingers in her hair. I wrapped us in blankets and watched that movie straight through to the end, and when Iris left me again, her white silk robe hanging from my bathroom door as a keepsake, my own blue flannel tucked into her duffel in exchange, I walked to our only video store here in Fenwick and bought a copy of that movie of my own to keep at home. I got into the habit of watching it to help me sleep at night, the robots' voices some small company in the lasting dark.

---

# HELP WANTED

First there was the battle to name it:  
the TV anchors rose from tanning  
bed coffins like the Great Criswell

delivering the horror to a swirl of graphics,  
sound effects, half-brained slogans  
and animations of the reanimated.

Beat reporters flocked to the scene  
taking (becoming) eyewitness accounts.  
The whole country was contagious.

The Falwells called it a plague  
sent from on high, society's free-fall  
into fagotry, bestiality, incest.

Historians—those half-assed punsters—  
called it *The Great Un-Awakening*,  
declared from over-stuffed recliners

that the outbreak, though “quite alarming,”  
was but a blip on the radar of Battles  
Science Will One Day Have Won.

But everyone was afraid of the Zed-word,  
that night of the living dead word,  
which staggered, moaning with the kinetic

restraint of a compulsive jogger  
on a transcontinental flight. Then—  
for lack of a better word—the plague

died down. The Falwells returned  
to their flock to plot. The Historians  
sat vindicated from the labor of inactivity.

The TV anchors scanned hand  
mirrors for stray tooth-spinach.  
That's when the towers arrived

glowing white with their clear resin coats  
like Apple stores with erections  
and we found ourselves on the bottom

dying to get in. At the base was  
an old-fashioned HELP WANTED sign  
with its white rectangular border

red background, and all-caps white block  
lettering, projected onto a curved screen  
that circled completely around the lower tier.

It was the kind of thing where people  
would walk by and feign interest  
by saying "Hey, that's neat," or

"Ooh, shiny," and continue on  
their merry way, sucking the last bits  
of flavor out of the crushed ice

that was once an Orange Julius.



# Who Will Be America's Next Top Mannequin?

in the commercial  
women and men audition  
to become mannequins  
for a chain of stores  
that sells casual party clothes

it's easier to work in the "Service Industry"  
with a perpetual smile, hands frozen  
in a greeting that broadcasts happiness  
with professional grace

once people begged to be awakened from their roles  
now they must prove  
that they can sell in their sleep

there's an elegance to their somnambulism  
a courage and a confidence:  
that it's possible to achieve warmth with a blank stare

one that never bumps into the wall  
of a customer's personality

one that reflects all interpersonal affection  
back onto the clothes at hand

---

# The Enterprise

waddled across the frontlines of knowledge  
searching for undiscovered fields to reap on the cheap  
staking claim to data mines where algorithms search like police dogs made of  
math  
for veins rich in young, wealthy or friendly personalities  
who match the profiles drawn with precision  
on the grids at the list management company.  
It's like a dating service that guarantees you will meet  
archetypes who not only fit but pay the bill  
for a small corner of the cornucopia made available each utopian day.  
And as those days proceed, with each grind of its temporal wheels  
history cooperates with industry, like labor once did with management,  
by throwing off niche markets, ephemeral sparks in a wild, rainbow profusion  
each with the tantalizing promise of treasure for those who crack desire's code  
or for those brands who offer identity's tastiest emulsifiers.

# Settlement

Sweet capitol of misdemeanors, great skylit penitentiary  
where appetites/credit/daylilies run riot

where windows and lunch breaks  
are exit and sentence

I want to call an intersecting ardor  
or else a blistering legislation  
what marries these banks/chop shops/civic sycamores  
to our private insurrections on the downtown bus

where someone's dear thief has just been paroled  
but not the extravagantly yellow forsythia

and no one invites us to notice the surplus  
of tent-towns behind the diamond district

and only the antelope obeys the storm warning  
while all along the boarded up boulevard

empties stray into brilliant assemblies.

---

# Literal Sidewalk Situation

Distant roads brought together in a way described  
as anything but pliant. Instead it seems

normalcy might suggest a stifled inspiration  
destined to exist as a hallway exists:

hidden between the rooms, the lowa of a house,  
the Tuesday in a week with no Wednesdays.

Somewhere a truck does not turn over. It seems  
there are no middles anywhere—there are only

logical lists in a sensible place. Perhaps calling  
my view of the world *palindromic* suggested

you wanted a window to work both ways, that you  
wanted coffee to put you into a deep sleep. Disregard

the snow-banks in your mind. Remember  
that ice expands as it freezes; its memory doesn't

defer to urgency or to what we desire. Snow  
and legs keep moving through the world

listlessly. So much for floorboards. So much for  
absence that I once admired or even desired as if

the world was in my shirt pocket waiting to unfold  
and scatter into the space between the two of us. You

suggested that a shadow could be musical  
or that the neck of a giraffe mimics the way some trees

stretch towards the sky, free of knots and free of  
the mark of history upon them. It's easier to say

the word *quaint* than to be that way. Was your  
attempt at sensibility a worthy attempt? I don't know.

I don't know how to place the weight of a breath  
behind the eyes. Money is a strange sort of memory:

remember the market with nothing for sale?  
Remember how we corresponded for a month straight

and how words became corrupted from their meanings?  
An ashtray wasn't anymore. Arbitration became

so apparent that suddenly knowledge (even a thought)  
ceased to be incredible. Take the words apart

and determine what a grin really is. I'm not suggesting  
that grace deserves a particular place in the world. I'm

suggesting that limitations are rarely deserved by those  
that impose them. Absence deserves more. You said

*water lilies* when I'm pretty sure you meant something else,  
perhaps something more distant. The sky was tinged

---

the color of a hangover that day, and I knew better  
how to talk to myself than to you. And then somehow

it's Tuesday again and a school bus speeds down  
our street between the rows of cars like some kind

of generous distraction from whatever mundane thing  
hanging over everything else. Maybe that word

was *empire*? Perhaps you were hoping or desiring  
a bottle to place this house (like a ship) into? I'm

hearing one thing and speaking another. My  
shirts aren't pressed. Hell, they aren't even clean

and their colors have run all over everything else. In  
my mind, I see them bounce on the laundry line

like only a quotidian spectacle could. Why must  
clarity be so deserved? I didn't understand what you meant

at the time, but it made sense when I found the skull  
of a bird in the woods. The climate changed overnight

and you couldn't have been more disinterested.  
A squelched fire hangs in the air and in the memory

for years to come. It's a terrible thing when we stop  
and consider how having enough means something

different from even a year ago. Think of a swallow flying  
from one tree to the next and think of something from your own

life that runs parallel to the experience of the first tree. There's  
nothing. It's afternoon all of a sudden. It's afternoon? If so,

it's a weird one, a place unfit for a poet but not a place  
unfit for other people who calmly disregard

everything but winter in a terrifying way. An idea  
along the edge of a season means much more. An idea

is one born from nothing and often destined to tunnel  
its way into a hole meant for a creature or for air seeking

out a place as only air does. Overwhelmed? That's only half  
of it. You can replace me if you like. You can look

straight into a mirror and feel frantic all without me.  
Perhaps when I say *idea*, I mean *content*. If you thought

this was both the ending and beginning of things,  
you were wrong. It's all up in the air. It's all past, future,

and present at once. One thing is certain: we can't see past  
speaking. If we could, it would only be a thread.

---

# Unmark

The serpent. There is, distilled  
in the dirt-trap, cranberry  
scale, slick separated crust.  
Repent, sweet participle.  
The snake approaches sharp-lipped,  
slip the mock on, the hornet  
pent in it. Protein the shot.

## from The I of Emma

### Scene II. *The Rotting Scroll*<sup>3</sup>

DR. F

So we had done her an injustice; she was not at all abnormal, a piece of iodoform gauze had gotten torn off as I was removing it and stayed in for fourteen days . . .

\* \* \*

Pull the scroll from her body. Untwine it from the blood; scrape the clots off the gauze. Clean the scroll. No matter, she has stained it, tainted his memory, caused him trauma.

Poor Dr. F passively watched the half-meter be removed.

The gauze that infected her nasal passage, caused her hemorrhages, disfigured her face, and inflicted him with distress. (S)he never recovered.

He writes upon her scroll  
creating a palimpsest  
rewriting *l'intervention* over her blood.  
She conceives the specimen dream.

DR. F

The dream that requited me of responsibility . . .

<sup>3</sup> Once the scroll had been removed from Emma's nasal passage, Dr. F quickly realized she had written lines upon the gauze. However, due to the violence endured within the body, only fragments of the original remain. See *also*, Epilogue.

# Pietà

Virgin Mary no longer a Mary, you are  
afraid to bathe. The body held isn't the body  
pictured. Fresco will be victim to form.

You stand fully-dressed in the mirror, covered  
with the shoulders of brothers. You remove  
the sweatshirt and asylum, votives ticking

into the wallpaper. Your last layer is ribbon.  
Unbound, your breasts, bruised to jasper,  
grow larger of breath. There is scarring,

the red faze of masking tape burned into  
the collage of body. When you were young  
and your mouth was washed out with soap,

you grew to like it. Learned not to choke  
on lavender seeds and the scent until every  
bar in the house was bitten. You squeezed

the bell inside of you. Everything wrong,  
but at least quietly. You count stinging  
Hail Marys on the beads of your ribs, grit

your teeth against touch. Their sensitivity  
makes them seem someone else's. You trace  
the depression etched under your arms

from tightness. Nude as magnetic north,  
you hold you over the water, and submerge  
the pockets of your body full of stones.

# All the Miles to Akron

Let's drive into the lake  
like we did last year.  
I am not sure how we learned  
to swim this wrong.  
One and a half miles to burning  
and the place in my lungs begins  
to float. No edge lines, soft shoulder.  
Numbers that tell us keep going.  
When the fire extinguishes  
we'll find it and wish ourselves  
out of state. Pump the brakes  
and swallow our swollen belts.  
We pack ourselves a picnic  
for the occasion. A pomegranate  
waters itself. A dream sequence  
in which I am the bear and we know  
this is wrong. Between the two of us  
we should be able to pitch the tent.  
Discover the maps didn't know as much  
and we were right. We start a polite  
exit from the road and end in  
a wheelbarrow of limbs. Keep me  
floating. I am not this dry. I am not  
this caution of tongues.

---

# Softness Bats

Evening  
television  
a political event  
isn't the softness  
of so

long ago  
that television  
softness  
bats against  
this apparent version

I have a surge  
when my wave  
sees the peep  
of a wall  
it's like

a teenage hand  
with a ring lost  
sweats  
as though there were more  
homework

or the future  
came early  
I lived much of my life  
as if  
to commemorate

a misperception  
a little  
filled in  
or spread  
as in water

# The Orb

*I say anytime you see a light in the sky, check it out.*  
—Betty Hill

I'm not ashamed to say I wanted a sighting.  
I drove north into the White Mountains  
for research. Nothing bookish: the kind  
where an orange light grows plump, pulsates,  
follows me down a deserted wilderness road.  
I'm on the lookout for stories with more  
complications, witnesses, three lacquered  
disks in formation, or maybe they looked  
like porcelain in starlight, their impossible  
evasive gymnastics when a passenger jet  
heads their way. I wanted to do a double-take—  
a cigar shape drifting in front of the moon.

\* \* \*

I imagine first contact to be like the time  
I saw a deer running from police on my  
overpopulated street in Chicago: a creature  
so formidable you want to freeze the moment,  
study every flickering pigment. Lucky for me  
this deer who could've cracked open an SUV  
between its haunches was running on the other  
side of the street, too scared to know  
I was watching. A perfect alien encounter.

\* \* \*

More rain. On the third day a slant  
of light, visions of October leafage  
swabbed in outlandish color—my favorite,

the brute plum-tomato reds gushing  
on the maples across the street from  
my hotel like washes of electric guitar.

\* \* \*

The day I tried another drive to the Hills'  
abduction site, Felix Baumgartner bunny-  
hopped out of a balloon sponsored by  
an energy-drink company and flew through  
the stratosphere above Roswell, New Mexico.  
Edward Archbold died after winning  
a cockroach-eating contest in Miami.

\* \* \*

Chased back again by rain and fog on twisty  
roads in the White Mountains. A few miles  
from Durham, on Route 108, during a clearing  
lull in the rainstorm, I saw a bright dollop  
of light in the sky, a white orb, and nearly  
drove myself off the road (now I know why  
Barney Hill pulled their car into a picnic area).  
Probably a helicopter, even though I saw  
no tail outline or taillight. In my rearview  
mirror, I glimpsed the ditch I could've crashed  
into—and I lost my nerve. Kept driving.

\* \* \*

Betty never questioned *her* nerve.  
She chided her captors for performing  
medical tests on her nerves—such nerve,  
she said, kidnapping people right off  
the highway. Her first sighting,  
mid-1950s: the craft exploded in midair,  
the Air Force explained it was a meteor.  
She collected heavy fragments of wreckage  
but couldn't find anyone willing  
to analyze their chemical composition.  
Three weeks before her abduction,  
she scattered the pieces in her backyard  
during a gravel delivery. They're buried  
where the stones are spread.

# Dr. Simon put Barney Hill under hypnosis. Barney described the humanoids. David Baker drew them.

Gas-fogged cat eyes clamped  
over mine. He never blinked.

A swampy glow wrapped around  
each side of the creature's face.

You'd have to run your finger  
from front to back of the head

just to trace his cheek bones.  
So ordinary, so round, a head

cavity large enough to contain  
those eye balls, hold a brain

our size. A ferocious mumbling,  
a membrane over the mouth, maybe

sheathing the body of the entity.

Wide cheeked, weak chinned.  
The plume of those eyes—

if there's a membrane, it kept out  
irritants and he didn't need to blink

to lubricate his autocratic orbs.  
No spoken words, only grunts,

prowling hums. Mouth a slit  
knifed into wood. A dusty

blue light radiated from the walls—  
I could've been soaking in a tub

of water. They might be any color  
but didn't seem to have faces

different from white men.  
He sucked air into piggish

nostrils, rocking back his head.  
I saw no bone or nose cartilage.

No hair. No ears, just holes.  
A sea wind made me shudder.

# The Reverend

Because I had no past I invented one behind my ear. Other than that small piece, my arms and legs are really all I have to offer. While I spent hours memorizing the details of this chair and wondering why the color doesn't leak out through the pores, you told me that everything written down was a lie, so I said SING: for the friends who aren't there, for the parts of our bodies that don't have hair, for the cross-legged ghosts on the floor and the skin that will never be thick enough to stop this blood, until we're left chanting these hands, these hands, and neither of us can tell which belongs to the other. I am moved by these pictures of your daughters; some day I will build a fence of my own just to see how I hold up in the sun.

---

# Since

Today is the day I let my hair grow and blow my brains out. You roll your sleeve up to your shoulder to show me the colors I've been missing out on; it's mostly reds and black. I've seen this kind of ink before—you tell me it's a scene from before you were born. Everything is something I've never known. A mess of inexperience; you've had 16 days to answer this question and 24 years to live alone, and it's precisely because I've never had a man passed out in his own sick on my living room floor that when I flashbulb back to this day all I can see is your blue-streaked hair in front of the lens, and me standing in the background, holding something silver.

# The good old days

While wrist-deep in my ex-boyfriend's asshole  
I sometimes paused

to think of what I would have for breakfast,  
where I could go, maybe  
the Cuban place that serves steak and egg sandwiches,

because I had a small cut taking a while to heal  
(having barked my shin on a table corner)  
some meat might have helped the process (due to the iron),  
perhaps broccoli or kale would have helped too.

# Killer Whales

The throat of the eye wants to swallow SPAM  
 white out black out back up and *drown*  
 in the bacterial reservoir e-server system where the drinking water is gathered  
 for the town. Just as pig hormones gather  
 for a denial-of-services  
 attack: face down. This invasive  
 species wants to thrust a jingle bell into the pink nylon  
 gunny sack party favor novelty in which the kitty sinks when it can no longer drink but  
 must needs  
 RING RING you've just won a laser lightning whitening  
 device one-stop-shop and monthly deduction a cornucopia of conspicuous  
 induction a deluxe luxury spa treatment complete with Bulletine attendance  
 a bullet embroidery to paralyze the nerves of the forehead  
 along its wrinkle lines: STOP. Credit check! Now running from the spa  
 in smocks and scrubs, every one a green-masked celebrity. We called them  
 Gang Green, the gang of three, the mother, the son and the holy  
 shit who let that gunman in without an appt. who left that caller on the line  
 HOLLER! going white white whiter all the time time time O FORTUNA won't you  
 operate the electron scanning device won't you  
 open a dry cleaner bag and ding-a-ling along the dotted  
 line the Mylar balloon keeps emitting sincere emotion to the crowded  
 garbage patch flotation device seat cushion rank drowned ocean  
 enshowgirl'd birds disrobing krill who can't breathe in the  
 memory foam videocassette vasoconstrictase because my face can no longer expand  
 to express  
 THIS satellite tracking device hurrumphs hump-whales &  
 sings through its transcendental tracheostomy utterance device (black box):  
*O Beluga Bellona the green bell drips for thee*  
*the green ball droops in courts of green*  
*inside white lines below white lights in pharmaceutical*

*fertilization dream convection concurrent titration  
vinyl tight or title bout these things are  
waiting at the station these things are  
manifestations these things are  
rank combinations—  
bio-accumulative plastique palliative compounding ullulative uvular  
arrangements—ineradicable particulate  
inorganic substrations—enfulminate  
baleen enshredded biocidal supra-  
pernicious defoliate formulations—culminations—*

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# *from* The Tranquilized Tongue

## The Phonetic Projector

The sound pushed through the mirror in the sparrow's eyes. The view opened vertically. The center of the statue murmured. The letters bled from the sleeping bird's chest. The tone formed an ant with incendiary skin. The name on the lips of the drone spit out pictures.

## The Drone's Orbit

The flock spotted the scalpel suspended behind the magi's back. The moths dubbed over the moon. The sisters spilled out. The vultures dissected the scarlet cathedral. The snow was bleached with sod.

## The Moss Vulture

The gloss the egg left inside the lantern entered the moth glands slowly. The bricks suspended above the trees. The blood of the panorama repaired the rain. The soot hooted. The hidden sisters killed the clouds.

## The Creature's Eclipse

The desiccated roots of invisible squids suspended the illusion of false animism. The immature minutes infused in a tree created the vestige of a wolf asleep in the pupa's husk. The seed's scared feelers etched spiders on its borders. The penned mane inflated.

## The Alluvial Tomb

The translucent quail egg dissolved the word quail. The blue scales on the pigeon's tongue predicted the sea's circuitous prayers. The torn monologues injured the orange lining in the open casket of a sturgeon trapped at the bottom of a deep well.

# When Our Tunnel Is Built

\*

When our tunnel is built it will be the time for our escape and I will chain myself to your leg so that when your arms punch out of the dirt and into the sun again I will be there too, watching your face gleaming, seeing clouds on your teeth. My eyes will be there to be the eyes that are left watching you spin in the sun, swirling on the earth, spooling out in threads that are my veins, in wires that are my neurons, in words that are the words I used before when speaking with you. The dirt under your fingernails from the digging and the re-surfacing a model of the clods under my fingernails, the brown crevices of my prints, my arms folded on my chest and a smile laden on our face.

\*

When our tunnel is built it won't seem like it has been so long since we sat at the kitchen table and watched the house burn. The smoke coming up and out of the toaster and the air beginning to haze. That morning that we were so engrossed in talks and plans that we had no time to tend the fire, to stave off the flames. That day, that morning, with the sunrise coming in through the window and the curtains blazing up around us and our hands gesturing like arms beneath a film soundtrack, wildly gesticulating to the sky, to our ceiling, the moments of our adventure. You recommending that we tunnel with spoons and me my face smiling at your ideas and the arm you raise when your mouth is saying I have an idea. And you were the one who thought to reinforce our structure with straws and you were the one who decided to strap water bottles to our ankles so that we could replenish ourselves deep inside the tunnel, when we were halfway in and could see how it was all going to go. When we were tunneling.

\*

When our tunnel is built we won't invite anyone in it except your mother, my wife, dragging her down into it like we drug her into our cushion castles and the imaginary bows we

---

pulled back to sling invisible flaming arrows into the heart of our tree. She came willingly, the smile of her face like a distinction between you and me, the dividing line of her eyes which you have sometimes when you don't have mine. The light curve of her smile on your face and her seeing you and me digging down into the world and she is so proud of us and our tunnel. She wants to take the tunnel we have finished digging and post it on the fridge with a magnet, every time she opens the door then to reach for milk or bread seeing our tunnel hanging there and you and me inside of it smiling out at her, the notion of digging as something we cannot avoid and have done wantonly, stretching ourselves long in its corridors, inviting her in a day among days we loved.

\*

When our tunnel is built we will pull our world down into it some nights so that the darkness outside is the same as the darkness inside and our nightlights plugged into the mud wall will keep us company. I will read a book to you and you will read a book to me and we will fall asleep in the dim light of our tunnel, making up night as we go. You dreams will be of flying and my dreams will be of drowning and in between yours and mine we will find a shatter of something we share and will dream together of all the rocks we have broken tunneling this tunnel from underneath our usual lives. We will live in this tunnel sometimes pretending that it is the world because here we are safe from the screaming that sometimes comes out of our mouth. We will wake up in the darkness here with feelings that we must go back, to the light, to the sun, to the way it was before, to the repeat, so that when you look at me with your mother's eyes and mine mixed, I will know what you want to say even without you saying it. I will follow your lead back to the tunnel's mouth. I will hear the bells of sky ringing as you step out and into the sun again.

\*

When our tunnel is built we will adjust to its existence and the dragons that we once faced on the outside will burrow down with us and come out playing games, tugging at

our tug-of-war and hopping through our scotch. We will make balloon animals together and imagine that a clown with red nose and gawky feet is facing us with his music blaring comedy in our background. This tunnel the carnival of us, as we play it out, all the time we have left before the walls collapse and the surround is only worms and no more wiffle balls or badminton. The inevitable fall will be in our minds but we will blink it away and put the dragon between us, playing keep away, monkey in the middle, his fire-breathing roasting our eyes and drying up the water that grows there, the tunnel dimming and the chunks starting to fall. We will keep watch half-heartedly, knowing. We will play.

\*

When our tunnel is built we will walk it hands in hands and marvel at all the things we have done. Will watch out its windows and see the grass growing into us, the forest pending. We will take polaroids of our adventures, the stretching we did before the marathon, the faces we used once and then never again, and we will pin them to the wall and see them museum down our walk, the time of us traveling by our eyes as we go, smiling and holding our hands into our hands. I made you and you are me and when we travel the length of this tunnel we have dug together it means we both know it. It will mean that I am you and you are me and the walk we are walking is our own and will never change here in this tunnel, not as it does in the light.

\*

When our tunnel is built is when our tunnel will begin to fall. When our tunnel is built the walls will tumble. When our tunnel is built the world will do as it does, we will go, me and you, to our separate mouths.

\*

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When our tunnel is built we will feel so lucky to have walked its edges and run our hands on the mud of its walls. Our palms coated in brown and we put them together to make more mud, the mud of us, the rhythm of our breathing is the same except my lungs are bigger and so I can breathe half as often as you. Our hands held together and I am listening to the double of your breath and you smile and we are always us smiling in this tunnel. We have strapped flashlights to our heads. We look exotic. We are wearing boots, me my moon boots and you your cowboy boots and when we run through our tunnel we make two noises, a cushioning and a slickness. You wear a crown on your head that means you rule the world of this tunnel and it means too that I am your servant. I carve your name into its sides, down the long portions of this tunneled hall, marking the height at which you raised your scepter, handing down the orders that demand I love even when I already was and would have always regardless of the gold.

\*

When our tunnel is built I will meet you at one end and leave you there, to soak in the sun, and our fingers will cease touching as I go back down its depths and you stand in the beams raising your hand to shield a brow that looks like mine but different or varied. I layer my forgiveness going back down the hole and you slough it off watching footprints waltz in the sky. Before someone sees us you say and I understand what you mean even though I have never heard those words before. I keep growing dark as I recede, moving back and through our tunnel again, a division. We are the cells that divide as they grow. If you still want me I will be here, in this tunnel, waiting in the dark for any signs of your sun.

# Reassuring Ommatidia<sup>1</sup>

*for Catalina*

we needed these treelines,  
cogs, running waters,  
hives, suns and nots,  
between us  
to fill in the missing bones  
of ourselves

both our soft eyesockets  
are nostalgic thick swarms  
communicating—persevering  
through all of these spaces

you don't understand

if we'd stayed in the hive any longer  
they would have murderkilled us  
we were surviving  
ourselves or/  
and we were surviving  
each other

<sup>1</sup> Each of the conical structural elements of a compound eye of an invertebrate.

---

# [the house with the red door]

the house with the red door—exists—it is the onion of the knee

does Florida connect space?

I have been seven—spaces of Florida had meanings

something networks drunk in my stomach, and  
that Florida might be that is—broken potatoes

that speaks inside the window between two spaces

hinge

people built this place where people only go to get somewhere else—

I consider the ways this city crosses—that tarnishes

hinge

hallways, elevators, airports, churches, train stations

## *from* Haute Surveillance

There are many reasons why the expresident's antibody was brought here on a bier. He thinks it is because the children burned inside buildings. Bombed buildings. Art. Sand. Femur-strands. The looted museum of his memory. All of it continues to burn.

He thinks it's on account of his wife, who wants me to teach Art to the shellshocked soldiers.

\*

I think it's because of the economy.

What are you talking about, says the president.

A bunch of shit, I admit. Whenever someone says it's the economy, they're talking about Art.

You were brought here for Art, I tell him.

\*

The expresident entered the White House on a bone-white Horse, tooting a silver trumpet, but he will not personify death in this tale for he is not yet ridiculous enough. I will try to make him more ridiculous but I will fail and fail because only by constantly losing can we have the kind of beauty that will be sufficiently flimsy. Like death. Or soundtracks. Only by suffering in an exhaustion of flowers and bodily discolorations can we have a cashed beauty equal to the saturation that surrounds us.

Nor will the corporate grinners with their wigs and blue shirts personify death.

My Starlet will personify death.

She will personify death as she sits in her pool chair wearing a blue bikini, her body starved and her eyes beautiful. She will personify death as she lazily handles my penis in the

---

remake of catastrophes with sloppy camera work. In the waning days of the deadly administration, the Starlet will personify death and I will be represented by pop songs about cocaine.

\*

Culture is a taxidermy museum but the horses are beautiful and the letter openers disinfected.

The cum on my face tickles as I type these pages out.

\*

*The Foreigner Body*: Must be entered into the pageant as objects to be classified and quantified. And it must be banged up. Banged. Bang. That was the sound of a door. The foreigner's body must be a door. It must be shot with the finest surveillance equipment. It must be shot. It must be numb with cum.

\*

I love Kleist.

\*

When the guards asked me all those questions (Is your body a faggot? Do you speak radio? Why are your spasms so infantile? What would happen if we pulled this plastic bag off your head? How is your wham-blam-dunk?) I could barely make out what they said. I denied everything, not because I liked hearing my voice underwater, but I knew that was what the kidnappers wanted me to say. They loved the way I said No. They could listen to me say No all day long and far into the night. This was a test. They knew I was up to the task at hand. They even removed the bag from my head.

# Flammable Matter

I pluck their ripe names.  
Hold them on my tongue 'til they redden.

How many fires can I fit in my mouth  
before I burn, too?

Last week my father told me  
*spontaneous combustion.*

*A body's bones can become  
sets of stones rubbing against each other in sparks.*

I didn't believe him.

Is this how reporters feel?

I don't know what a man on fire looks like  
sprinting down the street or standing calmly

as his t-shirt melts with skin.

Richard Pryor once set himself ablaze  
freebasing cocaine and drinking 151-proof rum.

Dressed in a bright red suit  
in front of a microphone and an audience of thousands

he lit a match inches from his face  
bounced it back and forth, and joked:

*What's that? Richard Pryor running down the street.*

---

# Richard Pryor

You live around white people in this country and anything can happen. I'm talking a year later I'm drawn up fucked up and out of my mind. I never thought I'd rise through a loophole of fire in a skin streaming with light. He had too much to live for, that's what they said. You find God quick when they find your ass dead. Fire is inspirational. They should use it in the Olympics. I did the hundred-yard dash in 4.3. I didn't have anything else, figured I might as well have some sun on my face. You don't feel shit for three days 'til your nerves wake up. Most people say you've been punished by God. Pipe would say, come on in the room, Rich. It took me three times to catch. They said I burnt fifty percent of my body. He had given me all this and what did I do with it? Maybe I did have a heart attack screwing one of the most attractive white women ever; shoot up my wife's car when she tried to leave. On stage, I had more humanity than a Sunday school teacher. Who else spun gold from such a scarred life? They said I died on June 9, 1980. It's hard enough just being a human being.

# Estate

The Nazi flag;  
the panzer marches;  
the transcribed trills,  
and his drum;  
the guns he had no room for in his gun-locker;  
the clips of ammo on the dinner table;  
the *Marlan* in the kitchen;  
its shadow on the floor;  
the stars in the black  
bullseye of his targets;  
a white attic-window;  
the books in the back;  
the thousands he hid in their pages—  
the rest of the fund  
somewhere in the yard;  
his library divided:  
the apocalypse, the bankers,  
and *Leaves of Grass*;  
*The Sexuality of Socrates*;  
the clinical video on how to tease an orgasm;  
*Deep Throat* on VHS;  
a copy of *Harmonium*;  
the *Kaddish* and the album  
of his ebony cat, George Wallace,  
dead from feline AIDS;  
an outline he drafted  
for the polemic he gave  
on the inanity of faith  
to the bedside priest at the hospice;  
the Rothko print he worshiped

on the bathroom wall;  
the stains in the toilet;  
the blood in the vomit;  
the half-roll of *Tums*  
I felt in a pocket  
of his bombardier jacket  
when I wore it at the sale  
and watched those rats  
scurry through his garbage.

# Fish Bones

My friend says

*We shake our words until  
they forget what they  
are saying.*

My father—  
dandelions a skeleton  
of white heads—taps  
his cane in a vapor trail.

We collect a birthplace  
of our bodies, morning's  
entrails reading us

primitive and dying,  
a scrim of sky

emptied finally of flesh.

# life/rite

*for Ruth*

I

Her lilies died  
on Wednesday.  
I can't seem to  
let them go.

II

Hours are spent  
watching the paint  
peel in my room,

peach to white to gray.

III

The taste of coffee  
hasn't changed.  
Only shifted,  
with more honey  
in the cup.

IV

Her t-shirt said:  
*I solemnly swear*  
*I'm up to no good.*  
Folie à deux.  
Follow me down.

V

Teach me to live  
inside minutes.  
Everything now  
feels slippery  
underneath my hands.

---

# Speech

This is about the body opening up, Hawthorne, garage doors. This is about the American morning I have lost, D. H. Lawrence's Mexican border, and Olson's slumber into the afternoon. This is about the Popol Vuh, the spaces between houses, and the suburban hieroglyphics. This is about the American list, the countdown, the top five, and the absorption by the body of everything. This is the body on the table and light overhead. This is about knowing what you're doing and going forth. This is about speaking out, holding court. This here is being with, only now having known what I've done. This here is against space; these words, I imagine, are jammed between houses and small grassy areas we look out to print the magical fire of the afternoon. This is the black outlines of the missing players of the orchestra. This is the size of one neighborhood and one radio station.

This is held up by Gene Kelly's feet. This is held up by wispy blonde hair and blonde eye brows at six in the morning, "Indian style" under a tree, prying open an orange. This is held up by the thinking of aggression then staggering blinded through the hallway to the day. This is held up by what happens, the mouth opening a spoon. This the open mouth is really just a dark, shadowy swoon tipping at the back of the neck, where we can only vaguely imagine. This is held up by dust's explosion of letters, the hollow footsteps climbing down the attic stairs in a house I lived in ten years ago on a sunny May morning at eleven. This is held up by looking, seeing the panorama this time not in a frame. This is held up by the body, but is more than a body, nighttime hovering above us in sleep. This is held up by looking at other mouths and seeing signs of opening. This is a square box, a holding, a letter to you, this is a gesture quite simply, forward, one leg always touching the ground and the other a gerund, the spring as the body rises upward, a move to you, the desire to paint while saying or say while painting, and dancing with perfect breath the while, and this is just the desire, because these are words.

## *from* The Depression

A man opened the newspaper & the headlines fell out. They covered him in an inky pile. With soap & rubbing alcohol he got most of them off, but some snuck into him through open wounds & laid low & multiplied. Soon his blood squirmed tiny headlines, spouting derision & fear. They clotted in his liver & they clotted in his brain, they filled the tubes to his heart & at night he coughed up mouthfuls that blackened his lips. He went to the doctor to have the clots removed & the doctor sucked out all his blood & replaced it with iodine. He went home that night, feeling limber & light. He sat on his favorite chair with the TV on & set a carton of ice cream on the coffee table & let the ice cream slowly melt. Drops of sweat fell from his face. The man laid down on his bed & folded his hands to say his prayers, but when he tried to move his lips he found them fused together. He licked inside his lips, but there was no seam. He put his hands to his head & found his hair burnt off, his skin slipping off the scalp like a shoebox full of zip discs.

Something is making the museum sick. Its eyes are red & it's gone through a whole box of tissues in one day. Its glass doors are blurred by handprints. The jets overhead shake the floor. But anyone can see a landscape with livid salmon clouds. Anyone can stuff the zebra skin. A guy with product crusting his curly hair, guiding his son with a gentle hand on his shoulder, turns his head almost imperceptibly to watch a woman's ass fructify as she bends over. At the Alhambra I took so many photos, trying to confine something inside me. Now online I watch a gif of a man in a panda costume knocking over a shopping cart held by a Latino man & his son—then the panda kicks at the spilled groceries as the father & son watch dispassionately. I watch this gif for about three minutes. I was born with this attempting to rain. I am running out of machines. There are so many things in the museum, animal, vegetable & mineral, it is difficult to even speculate on what it means to be sick, much less lacking. Nothing is happening on the internet today.

A statue cannot tell what he was a statue of. He knows he feels no shame. And he seems to have two limby things stretching out to either side of him. But beyond that it's a bit confusing. In the morning his shadow swings in front of him & it looks like he might be a prisoner & then an enormous radio. All day the statue & his shadow try to turn faith into fact by mutual libido. There's a face in a cloud. There's an eternity in the beloved's eyes. When the statue & his shadow sculpt they sculpt eternity & all they ever make is eyes, is night. At 7-11 they buy Super Big Gulps full of toward-eternity. Night, the sublime clock-face, sees beauty as the smallest eye. The statue reaches his spot in the sculpture garden. He says good-bye to his shadow after a lingering hug, steps back onto his podium & becomes whatever it is he is. And me? I'm just looking, just standing directly on the white boundary line. I look at all these people doing their thing. I cut my belly open & there they are again, all these people, doing their thing.

# Floating World

Hello to the marimbas of mimicry and high-heels!

The blowsy décolletage of elegy I won't display.

Raise your perfumed umbrella. Cloudmood's such a slut.

Sip rock gut as deer nibble the blooms away.

Damages will be deducted from the bill of silence.

# Shaped

The rectangle of a dollar.

The rectangle of a house drawn by crayon,  
a wagonhouse drawn by horse, by small hands.

Trace a smallhand into horse, thumbheaded.

Trace a red way down the sidewalk—a wagon.

Pull me. Push me. Dirt.

A wheelbarrow—trapezoidal.

A trapezius is triangular, angrier.

Hearts are not fistshaped.

Dreams are not spiral, but do  
spiral. Last night you making  
love to me were not you—you were

another man who made love  
once from behind me I think  
this is important how I did not

see your face in the dream.

How I close my eyes from you, but  
it's still you. Me, I change shape  
with shutting. Eyedoors. Years.

In the dream I went back to hurt  
myself with wanting other things but what  
shape is that wanting? Only

not rectangular. It is that there is  
a box here, confining me, corners  
counseling me how I am bad

to stand in them as I do  
wishing else. Cave. River.  
Years steep like money. Dirtspent.

A hand pulls at its traces. There is  
a bit. A pencil. In this way  
my life is communicated to me.

# You say she is a whore

I disagree: zero is a joke

walking into a bar, she is no longer  
able to contain herself:

∅

also, she wants you to know she  
was not invented  
or was, but in the manner  
of chocolate, a cooking-up of  
existence into something more palatable

she says to lie in-lieu is hardly  
an unworthy and possibly the oldest  
profession: before something  
there was its place

tent of disrepute  
un-knotted cord

she is cipher is not cipher  
not west wind, west wind  
a rose, a rose: zeroes (with rings around  
and pocketsful to petal death)

her too-large heart, being all  
of her, serves no function

her blood, shot through  
the universe, tinges  
things as they can be known

with loss—its red-shift

indicating limit: how thin  
the tent-scarves spread, how  
tenuous all

entanglement

# At Morris Arboretum

The trees were where the trees were  
managing to be, managed—dreamt up  
from other countries and implanted

like lies in the ear. “A tree museum,”  
I thought, and thought zoo, as my animals  
gazed at the weeping ones and ones

for forts and envisaged all the wars  
they could plan (gingko bomb, chestnut  
shot, sumac trap) beneath such

excellent protection. We ended  
on a ramp into the canopy. A sculptor  
had there fabricated a nest

for bird-watchers and inside it three eggs  
large enough to hatch children. Mine  
sat like mother pterodactyls. Mine—

fiercely brothered—at any threat will fly  
into a thing barbarous, keen, like me. I end  
wishing there were more trees and time

beneath to retreat, to walk back wound  
and worry of infiltration, of what is  
natural, what grafted—in these contorted

knots of mine.

# Hollow

Apologies are in order  
I suppose. Books  
have piled up, bulbs  
need burying, antlers  
lie unarranged in heaps.  
Hailstones busted in  
the kitchen window  
but the baby never  
woke up. How am I  
to choose a piece  
of earth? Anyplace  
I want to stay has a house  
already there. A patch  
of field, a fox afoot, violets  
shadowing the corn,  
thunderheads spinning  
threads of light. How I  
wished that death would find  
him kneeling in the dirt.  
They'll burn this place  
to the last acre now.  
Pale walls, bleached sheets  
and my own unseemly calm.  
What I wished I'd said is  
*I'll take care of everything.*  
It's what I meant, of course,  
but what isn't mine to do.

# I'm so into you, Anthony Madrid

Just this once  
I want you to understand why  
I don't want to talk to those people  
that you want me to talk to  
and become fast friends with  
You pompous ass  
you make me feel important  
and I don't want to work  
any harder than I have to to  
as you would say  
*bloom and flourish*

---

# I'm so into you, Nick Sturm

By now you've figured out  
what I wrote in your book  
that I almost love you  
but in a *we can never be vegan together*  
sort of way and honestly  
I would rather feel ill  
for the rest of my days  
than give up fresh goat cheese  
and steak

# A Fine Line Between Sitting Down to Dinner and Mooching

One day I was given movie tickets, a hammer, reassurance. The next brought food: cucumber soup, tabouleh, bread and cheese. My table filled so I took to decorating: gruyere dripping off lampshades, pumpkin scones nestled in the couch, sage roasted plums atop coasters. With each dish, I said, “ .”

*a man addresses the train: I have been in prison, I have been in pain. I refuse to steal, rob, or take. If you could help with nickels & dimes, nickels & dimes, out of the kindness of your heart.*

*later, a woman stands: I have two children, I have a marriage. I just want someone to look at me like they'd devour/straight up fuck me. Just one sexy look, out of the kindness of your heart,*

*is your heart kind? What I needed was a line to curl around. What I needed was for your house to blow up. If I am a deer, I am too gentle. If I hold your hand, I am not saying enough. Love and appetite return quickly. Thank god the lemons are complimentary.*

---

## Gifts We Can't Afford

In a city that hates us both, you are the first to spill, the first I spill to. We part deflated, which wasn't what I was going for. At breakfast, Abraham Lincoln received the whole of Savannah, Georgia, simply by reading his mail. He'd counted his men lost. *Should be* is what I believe in when I am bent. I would like to sleep as easy, write a letter to the day, written neatly as etiquette demands ("Your letters will not be welcome if a trial to the eyes," *A Ladies Guide to Writing*). Muddy Waters welcomed every note. Alone with worry and a bass, he came out "*different*, I gave the people what they *thirsted* for," which I am still trying to find—the thirst and the gift. In the land of the wealthy: high windows, a second morning, something caught then released.

# Rite for Unmaking

At 80, Clyde Davenport's  
fingers

cramped in clawhammer  
so he retired

the banjo, returned to fiddle  
his hand curled

around bow, his wrist  
oiled young.

\*

Some say it's impossible to return  
to the beginning

but take an avocado in hand,  
measure the gve

of skin, each leathered ridge  
slide the knife

in around the pit 'til halves  
open and

there is seed and flesh  
and waste

\*

Tonight there's no order  
nor music:

the whole erased  
with ease

the night palmed in sex  
then silence

snow that colors us  
darker.

# Match Point

Since when are my hands coarse like hands that are  
 not mine? Enough of rackets that resemble other rackets & certain  
 parabolas of our flesh. Enough with the net of proud squares, a  
 penumbral barrier. We take  
 sides, so do geese, whose left-winged feathers make the best bad-  
 minton shuttles. We hit one back & forth (despite deuce), back & further  
 to where wafts of sweat refuse our bodies to dry like IKEA glassware.  
 Same-sex  
 sportsmanship is promiscuous: each flick serve  
 flings a curve to *love-*  
*all, one-love* or *love(d)-one*. A topspin sometimes under-  
 spins, the shuttle falls outside the sideline. A linesman opens his arms,  
 but don't take it as an invitation to bed. He's not  
 me, not an allegorist. He makes space  
 to mean loss.

---

# City of the Vulnerable

Dandelions dispense Chinese fortunes

things like “In less than a decade  
no one will remember what cottage cheese is,”  
or “Each man is a half-open door  
leading to a room for everyone.”

You carry a sharpened melon baller  
and portion small pieces of yourself  
for every stranger.

You watch 8mm films of the rain  
on your bedroom walls.

Every car’s dome light  
stays on ’til dusk.

Satellites  
keep getting caught in trees  
and continually need  
to be poked out with broom handles.

In the corner  
styrofoam peanuts have gathered.

Every picture is of you  
bitten by sheeps.

# Four Experiments with an Entrance

Scarves coming out of  
or going in to  
a toaster.

Sock doves  
in coin operated weather.

Throat as a verb.

The void hello believes.

# Insert Banter Here

*for the other Amie G.*

There is an opening here. The bone the meat falls off of. A moment of the most amateur kind of dentistry ends with me puking thru a paper mask into my open mouth. The blender shut off as the margarita reaches ideal slushiness & the other stay-at-home dads of the 21st century descend, leave behind them *The New York Times'* Style Section, fruit in-hand.

The eternal motion machine of childhood swings on.

Or as Rilke says in the *Elegies*, "Neither childhood nor future . . ." Oh, fuck Rilke. The original hipster battle cry, the pop of the well-struck bongo, dead, replaced by Appalachian 5-string plink. A joke no longer a joke. I said that. A joke by any other name. Real news comes off online message-boards, the overfilled beer-foam sliding down the outside of a still-hot-from-the-dish-washer glass. Here's a close-up shot with a video phone to be made into extra footage for a remake of *The Blob*. I will be the one in the love-car with Steve McQueen. I imagine this will lead to some problems.

# Pragmatism

To kill a mockingbird is flat out  
wrong not to mention it is vulgar

churlish and insensitive  
and also requires an extreme

amount of concentration if you do though.  
Instead stick to what works and

there's no guilt for like  
dropping bombs from 40 miles up

on some place degenerate and fetid  
where faces are computerized dots on an 8" screen and

The Terrorist has a teenage daughter  
burdened by some barb-wired and boyfriended drama

and accuracy doesn't mean anything  
so long as you make it home

for dinner and a re-run of *Seinfeld*.  
Obviously I'm exaggerating.

---

# How to Become Awesome at Skateboarding

You must first know something about ethics of surface. *See also:* edifice of form and etiquette of pavement can be redundant. Cross-cut the callisthenic

arpeggio of space-time. Totally nitrous oxide the slow glide recumbent jelly, good for teeth to put stars on. Limb the rental nimbus malady of ground.

Please excuse my dear Aunt Sally while you postulate a preamble for buoyancy. Pete and repeat sat on a log. Kitty comes the Afterbang.

# Haunted House Moves Have Been Around Since the Dawn of Time

I am walking into a subdivision, and I pass a large delivery truck. Its sides are corrugated and rusting. When I turn the corner, there are three white wolves. They all have these large black beaks, and their faces are covered in blood. I detour. (I'm not an idiot.) After a certain amount of time has passed, I get home, and the same wolves are upstairs. But now I have turned into my father, and I am excited because I know I will kill the wolves. It is late at night, because I have to switch on the light in the dining room when I am looking for something to kill them with. I can feel the thick shag carpet of the stairway under my feet as I make my way back upstairs with the cheese grater. And then I wonder, if I am my father, then who is he, and how will we explain to Mom when she gets home that Dad is not the man we thought he was.

The following haiku, written by Columbia College Chicago undergraduate and graduate poetry students, were selected to be installed as part of a Harrison Redline Station art exhibit sponsored by Columbia College Chicago and the Chicago Transit Authority.

Even past the end  
of the Mayan calendar,  
I'll txt u my luv.

—Daniel Scott Parker

\*

Christopher Walken  
in a loose Hawaiian shirt  
orders a hot dog.

—Daniel Scott Parker

\*

A small child  
dressed as Yoda smiles.  
Be careful you must.

—Alyssa Davis

\*

The highway cuts through  
summer cornfields like a snake  
in tall yellow grass

—Brett Slezak

\*

A pigeon  
slaloms  
the sidewalk.  
—Matthew Sharos

\*

5,  
seven, &  
five.  
—Sheila M. Gagne

\*

When I am around  
you, my heart is a fat guy  
in a little coat.  
—Jacob Victorine

\*

This man always picks  
lint off his suit going home.  
Who inspects him there?  
—AmyJo Arehart

\*

I am being judged,  
so I take off all my clothes  
and wash them, dry them.

—James Eidson

\*

The difference in  
the dog laying at your feet  
and on top of them

—Chris Neely

\*

The way the whole house  
smells of shea butter and limes  
long after you leave

—Chris Neely

\*

Teach me, stranger ahead,  
to step between the puddles  
gathered on the stairs.

—Davee Craine

\*

I hear the hacking  
cough of my neighbor above:  
I don't know his name.  
—Davee Craine

\*

This floor  
is mine. I scrub it on hands  
and knees. Kiss it. Sigh.  
—Amy Lipman

\*

I ate your blackberries.  
Juice ran down my full, white cheeks.  
The bitterness was a surprise.  
—Abigail Wood

\*

Counting on one hand  
the number of people told  
of my father's death.  
—Tyler Cain Lacy

\*

Remember our house  
with the red-orange kitchen? We  
were never happy.

—Abigail Zimmer

\*

I have been waiting  
My day has been long, dear train  
Come and take me home

—Donnell Anthony McLachlan

\*

Out on the front porch  
In the shoes I left last night:  
Pristine spider's web

—Elena Ballará

\*

I woke up sneezing  
Outside the insects  
Were still awake

—Elena Ballará

\*

At night I look for  
the tiny bones in my hand  
but one is missing.  
—Laura Elizabeth Miller

\*

nomad in the blood  
death sentence written somewhere  
in the inner ear  
—Victoria A. Sanz

\*

News of a death,  
for the first time, I see stars  
in the city.  
—Andrew Ruzkowski

\*

In the night's orange dark  
red runs glowing and sparking  
along the lakeshore.  
—John Kenneth Bishop

\*

A soul in transit:  
when are you not moving on  
to another place?

—Brian Miles

# Memo Addressed to Self

My mothers may have been obsessed with old-fashioned looms and cats and stained glass; and our fathers most likely never ate manna in the desert. Regardless, now is the time for skinny girls in bikinis firing .50s, shooting down dysfunctional satellites.

And as Muttley waterboards a messenger pigeon live on Dasterdly State Television, I suppose one can't help but feel that there is something within the language of stained glass that turns me into a pussy-assed jack off:

“Stained-glass windows allow for only the blood of light.

Stained Glass is purity, dimmed.

Stained glass is the universe, collapsed.

A stained-glass lamp shade—forgotten, forbidden film . . .”

To this an equation: cry an infection, an ocean of clap.

Like circuses, churches don't exist as they used to,  
Not even in Mexico.

To this a solution:

Grab the leather valise, a straw pork pie hat,  
Steal a shiny yacht from the nearest harbor,

Set sail for the cloudless skies—

Of Mogadishu.

---

# Miró

In the beginning, there is the sun.  
Then the eye of a mule. These are  
followed by a tree, which looks so much  
like a guitar that the Spaniard, also in the scene,

believes that the tree *is* a guitar, & yet it  
surprises him that the tree, on which he plays, is not  
terrified of stroke, as he is, & more so  
because beguiled.

The mule stamps its feet; this is what mules  
do when mules think they are going some-  
where.

# [the geese had lost their minds]

the geese had lost their minds  
and spent our awful winters

perched on sunken shopping  
carts in Silver Creek

hissing children  
from the playground

so the city organized  
a hunt

I held a sign  
These Monsters

Are Lovely To The Lord  
in the other hand

my slingshot  
and pouch of stones

# Broken

Afraid there's something vital to your art broken?  
Don't worry, Eric, it's just your personal heart broken.

*so many, and you would have saved them all*

I wish I could tell you the damage is minimal,  
but here's the MRI: every part broken.

*the hurt birds: nerved high, avid, smart, broken*

Some of these lesions have been here a very long time:  
it begins to appear that you were from the start broken.

*but like the rest, you saw and wanted and took*

But the early-start differential fades with time.  
By now, you're like the rest. We all depart broken,

*all the good you thought you could impart, broken*

but we depart. From here, there's just one road.  
You drive yourself. Get in. *horse lame, cart broken*

# Why I Am Not a Panther

Somewhere it's a Friday,  
and in Vermont  
it is always beautiful weather  
whether anybody notices or not.  
People are clapping  
their little hands at a lecture,  
both before it begins and later  
also after. They are squirrels  
in the distance. I am not a panther,  
because I don't have a tale  
to tell you or anyone  
about the jungle, but  
if I did, I would drink and pass out  
on the lawn. We would drink  
and pass out on the lawn.  
The days would go by  
and the days would go on  
with a greenness.  
I would tell you just how  
scared things really are.  
But right now I am a creature  
of unnameable distance,  
the goats singing songs  
of interminable swans.  
I go home to a wonderful place,  
but it's only with a phone call.  
The people I talk to, the best  
in my life. One of them tells me,  
she is having so much fun  
watching a man making a crepe.

“I am watching a man making a crepe,”  
she reports, and hearing this I am sure  
of the fun on her face.

“Is that interesting,” I ask,  
but she is already drifting  
and hangs up without me.  
Have a drink, I think. Okay.

I drink. We drink.

It is still Friday.

Vermont is still Vermont,  
and whether anyone notices  
or not, I am not a panther.

I am a father  
missing everything.

# Radiant Action

It wasn't a year like any other.  
And we weren't the same people  
we had always been. At some point  
in the past—no one could remember  
exactly when—a cumuliform gray weirdness  
had settled over everything. Sometimes  
it felt like warm snow falling, but at others  
it was more like the clank of a giant's  
dust rattling through the pine needles  
turning all of us brownish red  
against each other. It had been a long time  
since we had shaken hands or pressed  
our lips together. All the songs  
on the radio were ambulances—not as much  
sad, as alarming for no good reason,  
the sound of babies crying  
and the whole town looking for a wolf  
in the margins, but only finding  
an oddly shaped three-legged shadow  
and some teeth, some fur, an indescribable  
train whistle blowing in from the sea.  
Everything was mean and low to the earth.  
No one was happy, so a meeting was convened.  
We all had the sense that something  
needed fixing, but it wasn't clear what.  
Clem thought we needed a new mother-maker,  
and that seemed like a good idea until  
none of us could figure out how to pay for it,  
nor how to support all the scraggly, unwanted  
seeds she'd produce. Lurvy suggested

---

more target practice, but everyone had already been shot before the great strangeness, and given their experiences the first time around no one was willing to shell out the money for more permits. A few people, Earl and Alice among them, objected to the meeting altogether, claiming that they had been less miserable beforehand, and that the green apple harvest was going just fine—that is, it had been before we'd freed the slaves and gave up bathing as a way to blend into the dumpster. Finally, someone—was it Wilbur?—got the bright idea to fill a baby rabbit full of gold glitter and truth serum, so that every time it coughed the air became temporarily more nostalgic, if not also metallic. No one could say for sure why this improved our moods, but it did, and we weren't complaining. We all went outside and stood around looking at the stars for the first time in a long time. Some of us went home dazzled, but those of us who stayed passed out in the wild, which was clever, and when we woke up the rabbit was the size of a small cooling tower. What this meant wasn't easy to say. Adelaide thought it might be a symbolic gesture, and Horace felt certain that it had to be a saint. These interpretations went on for several days, a big long list of opinions and voices,

but ultimately since no one was certain  
what to make of it, we decided to end it,  
and end it definitively—end it with a quickness.  
So Charlotte went and fetched the blade.  
Once more we all gathered to show that we had spirit,  
but when we opened up the rabbit, the sun barreled out—  
and now with even more new radiant action!  
So that's when we cut off the head  
of the sun, held it high for all to see,  
and ever since then we've been taking our turns,  
hoisting it aloft and wearing it  
over our own heads. Pools of blood  
have formed all over town,  
but now when things are weird  
we don't notice.

---

# Maternal Red Blossoms Petalled

Blossoms where your wrists were—  
An epigraph, and then another slated with cement  
I did not watch, I didn't, but I dream about it.  
Mother, this is the fourth line, the one that won't be repeated.

An epigraph with numbers bleeding in topiaries,  
Should I confess that I wanted to be there?  
Mother, what was the fourth line, is now the third line of this stanza.  
Cut the sign of the cross into your wrists, and if not, kneel.

Should I confess to your wrists that I have nothing to say?  
I have nothing to say, and yet I keep writing, and bleeding, and calling you mother.  
And you cross yourself with your wrists, treading on obsession.  
Mother, this voice of mine is foreign and bleeding.

I am tired of calling to you in my poems  
And death is a topiary obsession of you dying over and over.  
But my mother is dying on the hardwood floor,  
The repetition of incisions frantic, fading, and through your fingers.

Here—in this line, I give you the death of me not knowing.  
I slipped through your veins, the ones that nourish, yours.  
My repetitions are not the same, and you didn't have to tell me,  
But that's a lie, like my blue veins within the deepest of colors hiding.

Slipping implicates depth, and the gravity within your skin is related,  
But what happened? And I am repeating myself, which I sometimes do  
Lying to tell only myself and "She didn't mean to, she didn't mean to, etc."  
But she did, and I thought about it, and it's so sad that you lived.

What happened was there was too much lineage and you spilled choices.

In our kitchen, this voice is a foreign thing, and my atoms carry the same weight

So I haven't changed in mass or quantity, but depth? You did (how sad).

And I witnessed the depth of your red's repetitions.

---

## *from* Bloodletting in Minor Scales

Act 12: I can't give this a name.

[*Justin* is placed in an oven where he is greeted by two chairs. *Chair 1* is comprised of oyster shells, *Chair 2* vomits nacre. The remainder of the scene is unscripted. *Chair 1* swallows Justin to a place outside of the oven. *Chair 2* is dying, choking on pearls.<sup>1</sup> *Chair 1* is an exoskeleton of questions. Angry, *Chair 2* grabs a member of the audience, cracks the wrists, and swallows the marrow (More pearls). Justin vomits the oven. *Chair 1* grows impatient and vomits the characters to where the scene is birthed: the stage. He gives the characters time to nourish. *Chair 1* crosses his legs and waits [Engulfed in the mouth of *Chair 2*.]

Chair 1: In what room do you imagine yourself as a dream?

Justin: What a stupid question. I am a room of dreams. I dream of rooms. Why? Do I look like I dream? I tend not to imagine myself in any form other than in the present. Who dreams anyway? Dreams are commemorations of the non-present.

Chair 1: When was the last time you thought about death?

Justin: I died when I thought about dreams. I can't hold on to this death though. There is copper in it. There is water within the copper. But within that, there is metal and me dreaming within a small room with a campfire dangling in the middle of my chest. But within my chest there is me dreaming. I sometimes count the breaths of my father.

<sup>1</sup> Note to Chair 2: Death is the potential of pearls.

Chair 1: How many breaths does your father hold?

Justin: I don't imagine this. I think of my mother a lot; not my father. My mother is a dream. I am thinking in terms of my mother, the geography of her, the circumference of her bleeding. My father breathes, and grows older, but he is not a safe place. His breaths are acknowledgments of my mother. He grows in breaths. He grows, and I am left as my father. We switch places, but my mother is still killing herself. How many breaths in a breath? How many more can I blame? When should I stop counting?

Chair 1: When was the last time you felt yourself adding tenses?

Justin: I fold myself in tenses, trying to contort the blood. I know this is wrong, but the blood I can expel is my father, and I felt along the tenses of myself. My wrists express pulse tenses, and I don't know how to tell you this.

Chair 1: How do you consume?

Justin: I consume using the pronoun "I" and the present tense of "consume," but secretly, there is mourning in my consumption. I consume through tubes, dilators, and stitching. In my chest you will find consumption. When I was a child, I grew through consumption. The sun consumes, and it too is mourning. It will die by consumption. I will consume and become the sun. I will consume the sun. I will mourn over my consumption.

Chair 1: Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Justin: *[Plummets into a calloused veil]* Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Chair 1: *[Holds Justin's lingering]* Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Justin: *[Dissolves everything that led up to this moment]* Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Chair 1: *[Lies on top of the decayed audience]* Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Justin: *[Discovers no footing]* Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Chair 1: *[Embodies the question]* Was there a purpose in your mother's suffering?

Justin: *[Embodies the response]* She broke me into decimals.

*[Stage nods and leaves.]*

# If the Monster Wants You, It Will Have You

Depression comes from underneath,  
not from outside.

It bubbles up like butter on a hot skillet.

Don't tangle your mind considering

what is the butter and what is the skillet  
or you will become depressed.

Like that, unexpectedly, it bubbles up!

It is the cycle in the dishwasher when the machine  
makes its most noise, but the dishes are not yet clean.

We are built for this, this sadness.

Like a screen is built for watching

our souls are crafted by large hands  
for suffering through these alleyways of experience.

Desire is not the cause. The causes

are those large hands, and the aloneness of the soul,  
and not getting enough sleep or exercise.

---

# Wherein All the Action Is That of the Cat

the day prefers our continuing  
we have to assume  
still being  
and doing it here  
in the space  
I bring to coincide with this  
a cat just passed through  
w/ a limp mouse  
hanging from her mouth

like almost a joke  
about a cigar

and where  
do you hide your living head, friend

which darkness is it you prefer

# Subtotal

in the place I'm trying not  
to understand  
                          I am endlessly  
touching the planet  
I'm in its way  
                          where I live  
& got my own clothes on  
& with luck I will get  
your clothes off

what you see is what  
you get left with  
                          no  
please forget what  
out loud I have said

I'm outside this building on fire  
touching the sign with myself  
ROOM FOR LET

# The Artist

immolation  
drips from a finger  
finding  
rocks in guts  
and stripes on stars  
sits blow-drying a story  
and learning to breathe through a sponge  
whispers  
warnings from trees  
and secrets to a fish

# Spines

You fetch me water and  
break the dreams over your knee;  
termite bites. Pewter morning.  
My skeleton compressing or

collapsing and we make a lot  
of red sewing our fingers together.  
And you say that rains are coming.  
I make lace out of my hands

and everything will be alright.  
It was my footsteps or yours  
staggering down the hall last night  
and in the moonlight, weeping prophetic—

the hieroglyph we make,  
my bird body folded into you.

---

# An Incomplete Memory of the Body

I knew the rumors but sang the song anyway.

Sure enough, he came to me naked  
with a dimple in his chin, one eye hooked

by a fisherman hair still wet from the river.

He may or may not have cried the whole time  
we made love with the same kind of puzzlement

I felt when I saw a girl in the streets of Manaus

carrying her own leash and a bowl for coins.  
He smiled and one eye wept as he took

my fingers in his mouth. His spit made them itch

to touch his earlobes, his triceps, his elbows.  
I can't recall a navel. There were or were not

scars on his back from boat propellers. I heard

my name shouted in the jungle, but none  
of my cries were for help. I may or may not have felt

the fin start to rise from his spine before he ran

to the river. All the suspicious fires coming  
toward me through the trees brightened.

# Puerperal Fever

Don't believe what she says about me.

I bathed her breasts in rosewater and milk,  
seawater and clay, whatever she did and did not

ask for, but never once put her in my mouth  
to ease her. Why would I? I already knew  
too much of the body's wet holiness. I hid her child

and waited for my second death to seek me.  
I gave her the doll instead of her daughter  
to see how she sorrowed, watched her rock

its bound lips to her left nipple. I wanted  
to warn her, but I knew we must each live  
according to our hungers. You can believe her

when she sings about the black heat of paradise.  
I've been. Death found me in a rubber plantation  
six days ago. I rode to heaven on a burning horse

but came back to tell you every miracle wants  
something in return. Take your own breast  
in your mouth, let the steep light lead you on.

---

# The Mainland Recedes

When the boat  
pulls away

stay focused  
on the water

and remember  
you're moving.

Motion favors  
those who have it.

The trick is to not  
get angry

or distracted  
by your legs.

# City of Men

I walk on a burning road into a city where men live  
inside of men, breaking their homes into wild sobs  
and friction. Their feet are black, their faces twisted  
from wondering the difference between hunger  
and appetite. After the Advent of Intrusion and the Fall  
of Desire, the men disguise themselves as livewire  
and pistol. Their breaths lag five paces back knowing  
if they're caught by the inhale then the prison cell lungs  
will hold them forever. I want to cradle man's heart  
in my mouth but the jackal guarding his aortic door  
demands a payment of a penis on my tongue, flattened  
like a coin. A New Moon guides men to alleys slick  
with angel blood after one fell on a phalanx of bones  
left behind from some five-minute war. What's left  
of his gown the wind wears. What's left of his wings  
the men tear off and fashion small gods in their hands.  
I dropped my god in a pile of doubt. I have misplaced  
my hunger. My mouth is full of keys. If men say open wide,  
I startle with skeletons. Reckless, they pray to nothing.

# Cocoon\*

*I want who did this off the street, and I want the rest of  
my child.*

—Ms. Brazell-Jones, *The New York Times*

When Rashawn Brazell went missing, his story was frozen  
in the mouths of inanimate objects: the subway tracks  
spat no sparks for him; the stairway light to the train  
flickered no S.O.S.; the recycling plant uncoiled no ribbon  
of six-pack plastic to offer evidence, condolence.  
The first trash bag of his body parts hadn't seen his head,  
didn't know where it could be. Workers at the recycling plant  
found limbs in two separate trash bags. Still no head  
to say a name, to claim the body scattered like false clues  
across Brooklyn. A shovel holds memory better  
than any mourner, funereal mud and footprints  
from the preacher, rain carrying the sweet sting of pine  
in its translucent purse, bird shit from a nearby headstone  
washed by a storm to the ground; the shovel blade mouths  
it all—the tears and the grass and the rain's borrowed scent—  
and covers the dead with a choir of things to hold. Sweet song  
in the mother mourning her son, mourning what was left  
to hold, holding her one long note, her single note a hymn  
afraid of its own death, holding on to its impossible fermata,  
to the throat's quaking acreage, to the diaphragm's bellow;  
it holds on and won't let go, is pleased by this holding, and is  
changed by the woman it enters and changes. Song is changed.  
She is changed. And the city is lightless, O God so still.

\* In memory of Rashawn Brazell, a Black, bisexual man murdered in New York, NY. He was nineteen years old at the time of his death. According to *America's Most Wanted*, "Around 3:00 a.m. on February 17, 2005, New York City transit workers found two suspicious bags alongside the track at the Nostrand Avenue station in Brooklyn. One of the bags was a black trash bag. Inside it was a blue trash bag, and inside that were the body parts of a young black male." The other two garbage bags of body parts were found by workers at the Humboldt Street recycling plant.

# I Need to Count on All My Fingers

Scrappy I'm not in the morning. The light  
turns me into a full-body flinch, afraid of itself.  
I rehearse in my brain such extravagant stretches  
then perform them for you with both my arms.  
*Look*, the stretch says, *I've been still, now I want so badly  
to wiggle*. The empty stomach's wants are mountains  
of food. Tell me again about developing character,  
the way the girl is built to want to keep us with her.  
Tell me more about the one that wants to die,  
the one that wants a sandwich. Sometimes  
I'm impatient and perfect for quick bad sandwiches.  
Sometimes I plan to make a mess of demands.  
Under my breath I say *give me*, then write it.  
All the eggs. The bread in the world. A little more  
warmth in this bed. There are words I don't say,  
a mouth full of its thinking of breakfast prevents me.  
When I'm all by myself I toast bread on the stove  
to tell you about it. To tell you about them I invent  
things I like. Peas in a blender with salt but not onions.  
Driving with music. Bridges. I think. Like is a word  
that fills me with winces, it's so close to wanting.  
With or without breakfast the day breaks into its parts  
I take without asking. The only decent wants  
are chopped up or made to look smaller, as from  
a helicopter, blustery machine that comes to rest  
on what it likes, rehearsing none of its bigness.  
Everything below it shifting scatters. I want to ask  
you now to stay with me when I say it's like this way—  
it's all like—sometimes I let myself turn on the light  
to find the roaches still with me and they're gone.

# O, Ogallala,

My thought of creating a whole thing out of the driving through Nebraska thing seemed smart. It seemed smart, the color eggplant for two weeks one summer. No one got that message in Nebraska because it's insulated from those kinds of tragic trends and that's why the light's empty, like a big space the country cleared for itself so it would have a place to put all of its up-and-coming rock bands. Nebraska doesn't budge when I tell it that against my better judgment I've kept a list of all the people who have ever driven through the middle of me. I'm thinking *driving empty Nebraska along the side of an eggplant* and also other things, places I've been in the middle of leaving. Here's what the coasts know of an aquifer: that underneath this state and not only there is a hardness and a moving through and a hardness. I don't know how to reconcile them. I've been in love with digging down a little at a time forever before because one sees growth everywhere. I hate growth for how it indicates itself everywhere. Growth points to its own trees as evidence like *Ha*, but up is a scheme to a flat land. My long, flat horizon ache, Nebraska. The country's biggest moving thing in you, and who has seen it.

# Animals

Sometimes my name is Mabel.  
Here is my house: it is old and rickety,  
like the bottle  
of gin; it is empty.

Here is my husband: who passes me  
a placebo from his tongue to mine,  
to my lactating breast.

I've given him two babies; one born a bird,  
the other stillborn. We keep both on the dinner table.  
He reminds me he is an animal. But I remind him,  
"So are your children."

The floorboards creak beneath my feet  
as I pass the bedroom where inside I'm sleeping.

I lay next to a dead dog;  
his hot tongue  
rests on my belly button  
and I thank God the dog is dead  
because I'm no good at sharing.

# I'll Turn the Light On

There was this ladybug tent in the basement that Emalee and I used to have sex in. It hurt in there, our pelvises hit so hard we had bruises our moms didn't notice. We were 7 or 8 years old. We looked like each other, eyes brown, same as mine. Small deer in summer. We liked each other and we liked Madonna and her mom caught us once and dragged Emalee out by her ankle. As she was pulled her mom smacked her naked skin all over, and Emalee had purple rings around her ankle and marks in other places after that night. My mom said her mom was trailer trash and didn't believe Emalee's mom's story about the ladybugs. Emalee and I landed upon each other again and again. I took the top/it was my idea/I wanted it/I converted her because

I found a sticky magazine of a woman down the side of my dad's bed. She had cinnamon skin, dark nipples and the magazine was crunchy. Her nipples didn't look like my mom's. I went in the bathroom and locked the door and sat on the floor with grandma's silver vanity-mirror between my legs: water, flour, salt rolled and molded into shape. Weird bread. I'd sit on the toilet and talk to my mom while she was in the shower. When she got out she'd lift her leg up onto the counter and plaster lotion all over it still dripping. Milk and bread. All over the bathroom

I wrote in my Anne Geddes journal. About the sticky cinnamon woman, about Emalee and about my mom in the shower. My dad told me my mom had read it and he'd gotten in trouble for having the magazine and I'd better keep the journal at his house. That fucking bitch was gonna get him. That bitch that got the house and the car. That bitch who he hoped got cancer just like my grandma. If you're a bad person you make cancer happen to yourself.

After the divorce he'd show up drunk and coked up and angry, and he just wanted to see his kids, his kids for fucks sake. He'd bang on the door at 2 am and eventually one of my brothers would let him in because he's their dad. He'd go straight to my room, drag me out of my bed/*you just fucking wait* at my mom/my doorstep to the back of his head and the police were pretty slow. He was so helpless/useless and my brothers go on worshipping him because this is how real men are.

They have their kids blow into the breathalyzer to make the car start, wine bottle in the cup-holder. They only care about perpetuating the fake themselves. Those fruit flies filled the car and circled the rim of that wine bottle, I'd clean it and I'd clean up his puke, spit, his semen off the couch. He was molested by a priest and that's what it was he said/*you never stay where I put you/make me forget what's between my knees/my life has felt like a 3 in the morning movie on TV/I'm trying to tell you how I feel about men and women/Mom sung me to sleep in a rocking*

chair, I still had my dress-up clothes on/down the road, a car like a mirage, a blonde woman and two boys beside the car, dressed in black/let me turn the light off first/*tell me where it hurts baby, and I'll beat you there/this is how it's done/oh god I'm a killer/oh god I'm a killer/I knew how to pray with discipline, I can do it again. One on top of another, rosary beads/ladybug on a stranger's fingers/I'm praying every night, dragging words out by their ankles. This is how confession is done. The sisters kneel in the pew and pray the sisters say those prayers over and over/dad says I forgive you while he rapes me exactly as he's been taught.*



ceremonial

lavender

yellow sashes

at the temple

on Ashland, yesterday

---

# Bowing Out at an Uptown Jazz Club

They said he'd take the stage at eleven.

Trading his beaten messenger cap  
and old grey coat for  
metal singing 'round midnight.

He'd leave quiet, just as he came.  
Careful not to take away  
from what the nightcap, Jimmy,  
had coming from his  
Gibson ES.

But between eleven and eleven forty seven  
he was there.

Tapping his foot to the 7/8 to 4/4 to 7/8 free form,  
calling on Coltrane  
and Davis  
and Ellington, daring anyone to speak  
over what he was saying  
one last time.

## *from* Peyton Place: A Haiku Soap Opera, Season Four, 1967-1968

369

Would it have killed them  
to put some pizazz in the  
season opener?

370

Betty and Steven's  
marriage is in big trouble—  
big as Gena's hair.

371

A smart haiku scribe  
can avoid rewatching this  
talky offering.

372

First scene proves there are  
pervs who find Victorian  
bric-a-brac sexy.

373

Bet you're dying to  
hear Elliot tell the Greek  
myth of Callisto.

374

Sorry, Betty. Your  
tribulations get trumped by  
Rod's tight-fitting tee.

375

*Haiku in the Modern Manner*

The faces of these barflies in Ada's tavern;  
Extras on a cheesy set.

376

Betty can't divorce  
Steven fast enough now that  
Rod's sniffin' around.

377

Well again, the real  
Martin resumes his "grotesque  
manipulations."

378

Rossi's medical  
jargon sounds like pig Latin  
to me too, Eddie.

379

If you must speak ill  
of the dead, Ada, please use  
fewer syllables.

380

Betty admires the  
changing leaves. What does she think  
this is, a haiku?

381

Duryea, Sleaze King  
of Noir, taunts Rowlands, Queen of  
Independent Film.

382

Don't waste precious time.  
Skip right to Rod and Betty's  
climactic lip-lock.

383

Martin's sanity  
hearing. So few sets, I knew  
we'd be back in court.

384

Rita wants a boy.  
(Have I mentioned she's with child?)  
Les wants Peyton dead.

385

Betty sobs because  
she and Steven are splitsville.  
Say that ten times fast.

386

Chauvinism or  
foreplay? Rod bids "wench" Betty  
to take off his boots.

387

Do we really need  
to know that Mary, Peyton's  
maid, has bursitis?

388

The autumn leaves are  
blowing, but only in front  
of the camera.

389

A biker almost  
runs over old man Peyton.  
Otherwise, just talk.

390

Is it pointless to  
scold a killer for his bad  
telephone manners?

391

Today let's simply  
enjoy the way these people  
torment each other.

392

I did not expect  
Gena to tumble to her  
death. But now you will.

393

Betty flees in the  
first snowfall of the season—  
Season Four, that is.

*This is the continuing story of Peyton Place . . .*

---

# Shoulder

All these pamphlets of exhaustion  
flanking every rest stop phone booth,  
and yet daybreak, resolute, arrives.  
Masons carve through pure gruff  
to exhume punch cards, the monolithic clock,  
then slump out of the foothill's core. Meanwhile  
atop that knoll cradling the highway, a giant  
scratches his face and takes a seat.  
The design for the newest advertisement advances  
along the fraught trail toward viable thought.  
He lightly dips his paintbrush in the pail.  
Gelatinous ripples bob across the taut acrylic.  
The dossier demands a billboard for the new  
retail outlet, Exit 214, Adult Novelties.  
Phantasmagorical dildos, handcuffs, lube;  
the giant was, briefly, a sex boutique fixture  
post-divorce. The giant remembers a letter once sent,  
and the closing line. He averts contemplation.  
The sound of the highway stampedes in.  
It is the most patient inferno.  
The giant continues plunking his broom-sized brush.

# Crowds

Panic outmoded as paisley  
yet squat as a package of Tippy's

chipped ham in white wax  
paper persists: two jiggers of face

astringent a pony of cold feet  
plus brisk Velcro rip blender

pulse errant hair ½ cup of sex  
dream weighed down by x-ray

apron whisk until thick and  
don't go—steer me home please

clear of the marmalade-glazed  
sandbags the felt-mouthed

unsayable, back to innocuous.

---

# County Courthouse

Lorene is not high femme, she's religious.  
So when she talks about her tulips in those country western dresses  
hair stacked toward the bell tower  
or sits at the counter collecting restitution payments  
in completely carnation outfits  
down to her nails and hose and heels,  
she's totally serious. It's slow  
and hot. We gnaw bubblegum and watch  
the year's sole murder trial over the security monitor  
like a soap opera. The defense  
is extreme emotional disturbance. The victim  
stole three of the loves of the defendant's  
life. A question is how do you walk  
for miles along the highway carrying a shotgun  
without anyone noticing?  
The answer is the sheriff knocks off at 10.  
The clock ticks. Lorene winces at expletives  
and fixes her lipstick with a compact.  
Then she lowers her voice and tilts in  
and says the girls and I have been meaning to ask  
if you're pregnant? I can keep it secret.

# Interpretation

The way a man's back arches in movie sex is proof that we are tools designed to hurt. Imagine sharing your pie with a crow and never getting a thank you. This is a modern relationship. Pop quiz: How many times will you let yourself be adored until you realize you are just rhythm and skin? The bird's nest is full of dinosaur bones which proves that time is not a straight line but junk piled on top of itself that never falls. I have memorized a cat's paw until the sun revealed its last name was Kennedy and that it will die tragically and young. Windows and tongues are meant for keeping secrets. I've gone pale waiting to hear the truth about my own nipples in comparison to a queen's. I am royally fucked if there is really a stairway to heaven. I lost my legs in a bet over whether angels are the most primitive airplanes. I mean, how can the sky understand more than one idea at a time? When I built my house on meaningless grounds, the contrails wrote sentences in an undiscovered language. When you tell me you love me all I hear is *Blah, blah, blah*.

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# An Essay on Virginity

You lose your virginity at 18. Or you lose it at 14 or 20 or 25—regardless, it's an odd expression, you think, *to lose one's virginity*: the implication being that virginity, in its platonic form, is some smallish object, something capable of being misplaced, like the watch passed down to you by your grandfather—the watch you leave on a hotel nightstand in Chicago years later, after you and your girlfriend decide to sleep together for the last time. You don't notice it's missing until you nervously touch your wrist as the plane descends toward SFO. When you land, the phone calls begin, first from the airport, where you try, as calmly as you can, to explain the situation to the night clerk at the Hilton; then from the taxi where you describe the watch to the housekeeping manager: silver band, white face, back engraved with your German grandfather's initials; and then from your apartment the next morning, where you learn that, yes, they've found the watch and can mail it to you right away. It arrives a week later, in a shoebox packed with week-old copies of the *Chicago Tribune*. No, your virginity is nothing like that, you decide. Your virginity just vanishes.

# Try Violence

The cord around a lover's wrist  
tells us to remember. The red passion, the braid  
overlap of one body to another. Knot to knot,  
mouth to mouth, no one doubts anymore.  
She wears it rather than red the wrist otherwise.  
She read there was a cord from one dream  
to another, that the dreamers might meet  
while walking down the twist of thread.  
She has worn and worn it down. The memory  
reforms from stray fibers. Symbols are easy.  
Harder his mouth to her ear, the promise  
of further cruelty, how her heart sang  
at the mention of her own breakage.  
It was one room with poor lighting,  
and in it they had some measure  
of their shadows. The city around them  
took up her cry and echoed it in siren,  
a volley of distress. He left a mark  
on her wrist. She wears it to remember.

# The New Old Real Fake Ones

There are no stars in the night sky but there is a calculated light  
on the moss that frames the false

blonde in the act

of the slow reveal:

let us turn our loving  
attention to those pearlized buttons  
slipping from their holes,

the shirt slipping off her shoulders,

and the slippage

of her body against his, briefly.

Let us split up and search  
separately,

walk the basement stairs alone.

There is the world we're in and the world without,  
and within both  
there are monsters  
wearing the faces of our friends.

We were not always who we are.  
She was not always a blonde.

This ritual is happening all over.

We need to see a flash of the divine—

O those breasts—

before the blunt instrument descends.

# Wired Red Shoes

He grinned when he saw me roll  
up my heartbeat and light it  
like we were siblings, long hair  
and poetry, but he sniffed his finger  
to his nose at every semicolon,  
every stop that wasn't ours  
until more than the coast  
became blue, became my car  
sitting at a Hegewisch intersection  
between resignation and fishnet,  
wire coathangers I refuse  
to keep in my closets and booyah!  
I couldn't write the letter yet,  
couldn't answer to sister  
when the rent isn't paid in his name,  
and the dirt bike trails collapse  
into the river with the pill  
I have the right to take  
but won't because I missed  
that train car I had wanted  
to tell him about, missed the text  
I had wanted in river dancing  
with red shoes across his goddamned  
gallows, and the fiddler was fierce  
until she played for whisky,  
and I leaned into a man I couldn't see  
because my little red shoes came off  
and didn't fling me into the woods,  
and I could jump these roofs, or maybe  
those are just my axed feet.

---

# Rabid Texts

The pharmacy has an air show of real human  
hair she can't smile through, baked  
face no matter which shade of black  
she wears, and they burgundize  
the way to Chicago as if all the sun  
dials aren't registered, aren't counting  
the fifty-sixth text toward a handgun  
because you must stand behind  
the yellow line, man, unless you just lost  
your hold on Gary steel, on mullein  
still clenching November, and god,  
I need to harvest torches, need to fill  
the yard with concrete for the tramp  
-oline and strap my .410 to my back  
only it doesn't match my city  
black coat except for the hairs  
of the blue Burmese queen, and you can go  
up there too, ya know. There are three  
homeless homemakers now, and I want  
their fire, their plethora of ash  
coat hangers because all the tracks hail  
at their door without an address,  
without the need to teach three dogs  
to rabid at a marriage license.

# Dear Nancy,

Once, my therapist showed me a cardboard diagram  
of how rational people deal with emotions,  
the Triplets of Cognitive Behavior,  
and, for the first time, I really felt crazy.  
I've been writing to you because  
you're the opposite of the birth control in my purse.  
You know what it's like  
to be stoned for ten days straight.  
I come home to you,  
you sit on the corner of my bed  
and never shut up, you forget  
that ghosts can't smoke cigarettes.  
On your birthday,  
I buy you pink tulips  
because no one ever buys you flowers.  
Tonight we are alone in a dark room—no Sid—  
your skin fresh-looking in the afterlife,  
your lips a red fireball.  
The list of names you're called: *junkieslut/  
groupie/insanewhore/stripper/  
good-for-nothingskank/nauseating.*  
A fuck from you is called *The Spungen Special.*

---

# Maria.

Makebate: a person who causes contention or discord.

I was infidel. Your mother on her podium all machete machete

fingering me a fantast a dreamer.

Tawpie: a thoughtless young person, foolish.

She named me parlor trick.

I wanted your flat chest and crooked teeth Maria

your lisp your spanish.

At thirteen, your mother taught me to drive.

I think as a subtle hint to leave you the fuck alone.

Atelophobia: the fear of not being good enough.

She called me looseleaf. Olive branch.

She couldn't handle the slake, the quench of our millennia

how resilient and receptive we had become.

She wanted you volant and nimble Maria.

She couldn't supply you this catharsis like I could.

I'm sure your mother would have

adored our fraternity of narys and

ectopically displaced drapes.

Maria, if only this were an untold love story.

But some people limit themselves to one kind of love.

I was bottomless and perpetual and you misnamed me stupid.  
You thought me colorless and I saw only your brown skin.  
You named yourself righteous rise of the moon  
I light scratch of bones  
Knuckled in, run away, deep wrinkle,                      bending

Maria means galaxy, means elegance.  
Your mother deems me yellow, placid  
She calls me out all  
parachute and conquered thumb.

If you must be Maria, I am potluck,  
beastly and unqualified.

# My Zombie

My  
zombie shuff-  
les down the hallway and breaks through  
the  
bedroom door. My zombie  
is pushed by hunger, the desire

to  
cram Twinkies  
and beef jerky into his cram  
hole.  
He can perform simple  
repetitive tasks. Good zombie.

My  
zombie shuff-  
les through his iPod while waiting  
for  
the train. He drinks a can  
of Mountain Dew although he knows

the  
dangers of  
corn syrup. My zombie forgets  
mind-  
fulness. Not surprising,  
my zombie has gingivitis.

My

zombie does

not know how to deal with

old

love letters. He locks them

up alone and drinks whiskey neat,

staring through the kitchen table.

---

# In the Quiet of the Northwoods

lightning clouds strobe  
on the far shore

the dim of the bonfire's last  
orange gasp, breath-  
ing weak heat

i ask my sister  
*do you believe in god?*  
she tells me  
about rum and  
various sodas

i decide that it would be best  
to not tell her about the zombie  
creeping in the trees along the water

so we just watch  
the pop and  
sizzle of pine,  
hear the white  
caps breaking  
on the rocks

# The Wreck

We approach the flipped truck—  
an upturned turtle on the dark  
lawn. You pull to a stop on shoulder,

grit settles into gravel surf. You say,  
“Stay in the car.” I would have  
driven past, but you belly-crawl

on broken glass, lay like a child  
trying to lure a cat from under  
the bed until the sirens take over.

I want to lie under you, test  
your flame-retardant cape,  
but we leave before the extraction.

Before surgeons hand off  
a waxy kidney like an old  
telephone still trailing a limp

cord, packed in ice and cradled  
like an endzone pass. Before  
a set of lungs are helicoptered,

heart still attached. Somewhere  
a woman sleeps alone for the first  
time in years. We wake to a mad

doe stripping the room, tracking  
the scent of her salted buck,  
ramming wet into the wall.

---

## *from* My Book Report on the Afterlife

It's so quiet in my mind you can hear a hot dog  
thaw off from its seven enemies.

Beautiful women sunbathe on their stomachs,  
straps undid. Beautiful men, too.

It's so quiet in my mind waves turn in on themselves.  
Bad shit goes down in the middle of the ocean,

but not in my mind, where she never comes home  
with the fruit. I had my mind clear-felled.

A deer just nuzzled an electric fence but you didn't  
hear it because you're in my mind,

where telephones are never invented.  
Reach me via milk.

Down in Carolina I got chopped,  
slow shoulders. I got the eels.  
I got started with by appleheads,  
wedged into the bathroom door

like a green New Testament.  
Mom always said start a fight  
you're grounded. Finish it we'll clog you  
up with French fries. I prefer bad thoughts.

I control the goat hammer.  
When it strikes I'll be in some bed with a beer  
and sand in my hair, lying  
like a bat laughing at the funny pages.

They won't upset my weather experiments.  
I'll find the least rained on animal.

---

# Sleep is Mourning for the Eyes

That we earn a third shoulder  
to get upriver and then fall shapeless  
seems a raw deal to one  
who's yet to taste the aftergas.

If I don't bellow you I become 184  
boxless Kleenex before a jet engine.

It's weird that an animal lives  
in a tree and just sings when you can't  
sleep, and trees grow weirder  
in magnificence when you cut them

open and finger their paste  
in your weird bean brain

where he holds a fluorescent tube  
over his head, powered by a far  
off radio, and turns into the woods,  
lights it up and amplifies the birds.

# Purple Music

I had a dream about Thelonious Monk  
and in that dream I told him I missed him

I told him I miss him . . .  
I missed him

the beautiful ones you always lose  
the gargoyle ate them all

all of them . . .  
he ate them

I threw anything  
I could find  
rocks, I threw rocks  
I threw shoes  
I threw lamps  
I threw a table  
brick  
and mortar  
and dirt  
and towels  
I threw my mom  
I threw my mom  
I threw chairs  
bubble gum  
tables  
light bulbs  
lamps  
trees  
big blocks of wood  
small pills of aspirin

I pulled up turnips  
And I threw turnips  
like Princess Toadstool  
I threw turnips  
thoughts  
and pictures  
and metaphors  
I jumped in the Atlantic  
and picked up the Amistad  
and I threw the whole fuckin Amistad  
and I threw bubble gum  
Gabriel helped me throw Metatron  
and then I threw Gabriel  
I threw purple  
I took small tufts of clouds  
and I threw clouds  
and 33 and a thirds  
and jewel cases  
spit  
hair  
nails  
caskets  
crucifixes  
chunks of cement  
Abraham Lincoln's right eye  
the bullet that shot Franz Ferdinand  
Kennedy  
Malcolm  
Martin  
Pac  
Christopher

Mahatma  
the one that started the revolution  
which will be televised  
along with the TV  
I threw 1080p  
and 720  
and standard definition  
and mayors  
and hubcaps  
projectors  
asbestos  
the football  
lock combinations  
and bubble gum  
did I say I threw the  
bubble gum  
it was 1989  
and I threw  
bubble gum

I once threw a Bible through a plate glass window  
and it went all the way to Tehran

and this guy caught it  
and pissed on it  
and he burned it  
and he ate it  
and he shit it out

all in about 15 minutes  
it goes through the system fast . . .

# Labyrinth 39

The boy in the labyrinth feels the calm churn. Circles of hot breath swirl and swell. There is a boy in the sky who steadies his gaze and a beast wheezing in the black. Deep in the earth the breath stirs up smells: sulfur, earth, every noxious root splitting the seams of crust. The boy in the labyrinth feels the eyes of beings. Steam against his back shifts the torch flame from side to side. The shadow of a motionless boy, there aloft in the sky. The boy in the labyrinth thinks it strange to be the center of attention. Thinks it odd, the way the geodes catch light's furtive glances. The way the pitchblende hardens the dark.

# Labyrinth 41

The boy in the labyrinth shouts loud vowels at the damp mineral deposits in the walls. His voice tries to pierce through the gloom. It trebles back, thick and high, mimics the gesture of the maze's discreet geology. And so the sound of him spills its waves into a disfigured future. His voice sieved on the rebound. As if compelled to shear itself of various layers. Sound parsed into other sounds. The tremolo. The angular anguish of a throated trill. Though sweetness fills his mouth, the earth concedes its own tangled brooding sidestep. Its own quotidian.

# Labyrinth 43

The boy in the labyrinth watches the shadows cast from his hands. This finger becomes an ear. These fingers looped around just so make eyeholes. The mask of who the boy wishes to be. And in the darkness, the swollen grief of being clangs out its reverb against the molten rock. The darkness is its own casual body, speaking in a language that's shaped by trickery—as when two hands form the mouth of a dog. As when two fingers rise into the light and listen to their maker's breath.

## *from* Footnotes on the City

Longer than the boys had lived, a truck stood stuck in the riverbank  
like a foot. Foot of God or foot of long lost brother  
lost to the river. The boys doubledog each other to sit & honk  
the last honk left in the horn. Brian, the boys mimic the truck until they're  
the sound of axles. Until they are the blush of windows. All morning  
is to find the right shade of lipstick rust. The city rises with the temperature  
until it's engine everywhere. Smaller houses grow to the color  
of a grease-been-stained. The river is sprockets  
the boys try to contain in their hands. Boys, the first audience  
to the first skyscraper. Rumor says it came like a storm  
One night appeared as a forearm reaching. The next its marrow  
spooned empty for occupants. The boys still sing the same love songs  
into the river / out of the boys comes the river  
The city a dog asleep on its back

---

# Pedagogical Imperative

True, sunlight was, for a time,  
nomadic, if only in our affectionate  
rejection of actually having to give it  
a name. The more we thought  
about it, the more the thought  
would recede, condensing elsewhere  
and always later on. A candle doesn't care  
about shadows, nor should it,  
waiting to leave less of itself  
in the same way. But which way was it?  
All this talk of illumination and already  
the under-lit hallway of self-composure  
seems ready to erupt, or, more accurately,  
to collapse, although they're both  
insufferable stand-ins for what we were  
after—non-picturesque separation,  
like stepping purposefully in a puddle  
to become saturated with whatever  
the world's put in front of you.  
And behind? We don't look that way  
anymore, do we? The door faces only  
ever-outward permanence, until that  
too, friends, dim constellations, fades.



contributors



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**Traci Brimhall** is the author of *Our Lady of the Ruins* (W.W. Norton, 2012), winner of the Barnard Women Poets Prize, and *Rookery* (SIU Press, 2010), winner of the Crab Orchard Series First Book Award. Her poems have appeared in *Kenyon Review*, *Slate*, *VQR*, *New England Review*, and elsewhere. A former Halls Poetry Fellow at the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, she's currently a doctoral candidate and King/Chvez/Parks Fellow at Western Michigan University.

**Heather Christle** lives in Northampton, Massachusetts. She is the author of three poetry collections, most recently *What Is Amazing* as well as a new chapbook, *private party*.

**Adam Clay** is the author of *A Hotel Lobby at the Edge of the World* (Milkweed Editions, 2012) and *The Wash* (Parlor Press, 2006). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *Ploughshares*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Iowa Review*, *New Orleans Review*, and elsewhere. He co-edits *TYPO* and lives in Kentucky.

**Alison Cooper** resides in Bellingham, Washington. She is the editor of *Jeopardy Magazine*, and her poetry has been featured in *Labyrinth* and *Unspoken NW*.

**Liz Countryman** is Writer-in-Residence at the University of South Carolina and a 2012 MacDowell fellow. Her poetry has appeared in *Hayden's Ferry*, *Washington Square*, *H\_NGM\_N*, *Handsome*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Forklift*, *Ohio*, and elsewhere.

**Nick Courtright** is the author of *Punchline*, a National Poetry Series finalist published in 2012 by Gold Wake Press, and *Let There Be Light*, which is forthcoming in early 2014. His work has appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Boston Review*, and *Kenyon Review Online*, among numerous others, and a chapbook, *Elegy for the Builder's Wife*, is available from Blue Hour Press.

**Heather Cox** is the founding editor of *Ghost Ocean Magazine* and the chapbook press Tree Light Books. Heather's work has been published or is forthcoming in *PANK*, *Mid-American Review* (Editor's Choice, 2012 Finline Competition), *Midwestern Gothic*, *Toad Suck Review*, *Moon City*, and *Thrush Press*, among others; her poetry has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and her chapbook *Dream Seller* was a 2012 Strange Machine Books finalist.

**Davee Craine** moved from Los Angeles to Chicago to pursue his M.F.A. at Columbia College Chicago. His work has appeared in *Columbia Poetry Review*, and has been anthologized in *Kind of a Hurricane Press*.

**Patrick Culliton** lives in Chicago. He is the author of *Hornet Homily* (Octopus Books) and *Horse Ballast* (forthcoming, Pavement Saw Press). Recent poems have appeared in *Phantom Limb*, *Court Green*, and *Carbon Copy*.

**Alyssa Davis** is a graduate student at Columbia College Chicago. She likes red lipstick and anything related to Cher.

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**Oliver de la Paz** is the author of three books of poetry and the co-editor of *A Face To Meet The Faces: An Anthology Of Contemporary Persona Poetry*. His work has appeared in journals such as *Tinhouse*, *New England Review*, and *The Southern Review*. He co-chairs the Kundiman.org advisory board and teaches creative writing at Western Washington University.

**Jaclyn Dwyer** earned an M.F.A. from the University of Notre Dame, where she received the Sparks Fellowship. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *New Ohio Review*, *Witness*, *Copper Nickel* and *Phoebe*. Jaclyn is a student at Florida State's Ph.D. program in Creative Writing, where she received a Kingsbury Fellowship.

**James Eidson** grew up around Dallas. He's currently pursuing his M.F.A. at Columbia College Chicago. So far he has yet to publish much, but his future resumé is intimidating.

**Laura Eve Engel's** work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in the *Boston Review*, *Crazyhorse*, *Pleiades*, *The Southern Review* and elsewhere. She lives in Brooklyn.

**Casey Fagan** lives in Birmingham, Alabama. She is a 2012 Ruth Lilly Fellowship finalist and has work forthcoming in *Painted Bride Quarterly*.

**Rebecca Farivar** is the author of *Correct Animal* (Octopus Books, 2011) and chapbooks *Am Rhein* (Burnside Review, 2013) and *American Lit* (Dancing Girl Press, 2011). She holds an M.F.A. from St. Mary's College of California and hosts the podcast *Break The Line*. Currently, she lives in Oakland, California.

**Lisa Fishman's** most recent books are *FLOWERCART* (Ahsahta, 2011) and *Current* (Parlor Press 2011). She has new work in *jubilat*, *VOLT*, *they will sew the blue sail*, and elsewhere. She recently completed a residency in Fort Atkinson and Blackhawk Island, Wisconsin, as the first Lorine Niedecker Poet-in-Residence. She lives in Orfordville, WI.

**Stephanie Ford** lives in Los Angeles. Her poems have appeared recently or are forthcoming in *Boston Review*, *Denver Quarterly*, *Colorado Review*, and *Fence*. Her full-length manuscript was a finalist for the 2012 New Issues Poetry Prize and the 2012 Slope Editions Book Prize.

**Logan Fry** lives in Austin, where he is an M.F.A. candidate at the University of Texas. He is an associate poetry editor of *Bat City Review* and co-editor of *Flag & Void*. His poetry has recently appeared in *Caketrain*, *DIAGRAM*, *filling Station*, *elimae*, and elsewhere.

**Sheila M. Gagne** recently finished her B.A. in Poetry with a minor in Writing for Television at Columbia College Chicago. She is the former president of VERBATM, the college's poetry performance organization. Her work has appeared in the *Willow Review*, *The Legendary*, and is a winner of the 2013 Poetry That Moves contest.

**Molly Gaudry** is the author of the verse novel *We Take Me Apart*, which was shortlisted for the 2011 PEN/Joyce Osterweil and named 2nd finalist for the 2011 Asian American Literary Award for Poetry. A new collection of short prose, titled *Lost July*, is now available in the 3-authors, 3-bands project *Frequencies*, from YesYes Books.

**Matthew Gilbert**, as a member of the 2009 Connecticut Poetry Circuit, toured colleges around his home state to give readings. He received his B.A. from the University of Hartford and his M.F.A. from Columbia University. His poetry has been published in *Connecticut Review*, *PANK*, *Apalachee Review*, and *death hums*.

**Johannes Göransson's** book *Haute Surveillance*, will be published in April 2013 by Tarpaulin Sky Press. He teaches in the M.F.A. program at the University of Notre Dame.

**Noah Eli Gordon** lives in Denver with his boo Sommer Browning. *The Year of the Rooster* is forthcoming from Ahsakta Press in May of 2013. He operates various levers behind Letter Machine Editions, *The Volta*, Subito Press, and CU-Boulder's M.F.A. program.

**Mark Gosztyla's** poems have recently appeared in *The Associative Press*, *Requited*, and *Tuesday; An Art Project*. He received an M.F.A. from the University of New Hampshire and currently teaches poetry at Tufts University. Mark lives with his family in New Haven, Connecticut.

**Kimberly Grey** is a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University. Her poems have appeared in *The Southern Review*, *Boston Review*, *TriQuarterly*, *Best New Poets*, and on *Poetry Daily*. She lives in the San Francisco Bay area.

**Matt Hart** is the author of four books of poems, most recently *Sermons and Lectures Both Blank and Relentless* (Typecast, 2012). A fifth collection, *Debauched Debauched*, will be published by H\_NGM\_N BKS in the spring of 2013. A co-founder and the editor-in-chief of *Forklift, Ohio: A Journal of Poetry, Cooking, & Light Industrial Safety*, lives in Cincinnati and plays in the band Travel.

**Rebecca Hazelton** is the author of *Fair Copy* (Ohio State University Press, 2012), winner of the 2011 Ohio State University Press / The Journal Award in Poetry, and *Vow*, from Cleveland State University Press 2013. She was the 2010-11 Jay C. and Ruth Halls Poetry Fellow at the University of Wisconsin—Madison Creative Writing Institute and winner of the “Discovery” / *Boston Review* 2012 Poetry Contest. Her poems have appeared in *AGNI*, *The Southern Review*, *Boston Review*, and *Best New Poets 2011*.

**Jordan D. Hill** is an M.F.A. candidate at Columbia College Chicago, where he works as a writing consultant and adjunct instructor of English. He enjoys exploring alternate realities and states of mind, and his work has been published in *Parallax*.

**Chas Hoppe** pays the bills as a freelance writer and editor, and pays respect as a poet and musician. His poems have appeared in journals such *Heavy Feather Review*, *Alligator Juniper*, and *Glass*. He and poet Joshua Young recently collaborated on a collection called *The Diegesis* (Gold Wake Press, 2013).

**Simon Jacobs** is an angry young writer from Ohio. He curates the *Safety Pin Review*, a wearable medium for work under 30 words, and his writing has appeared in places like *Word Riot*, *PANK*, and *NANO Fiction*. He is perpetually on the verge of discovering what everyone else has known for years.

**George Kalamaras** is the author of six full-length books of poetry, and seven chapbooks, including *Symposium on the Body's Left Side*, *Your Own Ox-Head Mask as Proof*, *The Recumbent Galaxy* (co-authored with Alvaro Cardona-Hine), and *Kingdom of Throat-Stuck Luck*, winner of the Elixir Press Poetry Contest. He recently won the New Michigan Press/Diagram Chapbook Contest for his collection, *The Mining Camps of the Mouth*. He is Professor of English at Indiana University-Purdue University Fort Wayne, where he has taught since 1990.

**Kirsten Kaschock's** debut novel, *Sleight*, was published by Coffee House Press in 2011. A chapbook of her poetry, *Windowboxing*, is forthcoming from Bloof Books. Other recent work can be found in *BOMB Magazine*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Antioch Review*, and *The Collagist*. Kirsten is currently in the last throes of her doctoral dissertation in dance at Temple University.

**L. S. Klatt's** work has or will appear in *New Orleans Review*, *Indiana Review*, *Blackbird*, *Denver Quarterly*, and *Narrative*. In 2011, his lyric, "Andrew Wyeth, Painter, Dies at 91," was made into a ninety-second animated film by MotionPoems. He lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

**Tyler Cain Lacy** lives in Chicago, where he is pursuing an M.F.A. at Columbia College. Recent work can be found in *Caliban*, *Barcelona Ink*, *E-ratio*, and *elima*e, among others.

**Krystal Languell** is the author of *Call the Catastrophists* (BlazeVox, 2011) and the chapbook *many lost cause creatures* (Dusie Kollektiv, 2011). Recent work has appeared in *la fovea*, *The Awl*, *Two Serious Ladies* and elsewhere. Founder of the feminist literary journal *Bone Bouquet*, she is part of the Belladonna Collaborative in Brooklyn and teaches writing at the Borough of Manhattan Community College and Pratt Institute.

**Dolly Lemke** lives and works in Chicago. Her poems have been published in *Court Green*, *Sink Review*, *Salt Hill*, and elsewhere. Her chapbook *O Town Heights* was published in 2012 by DoubleCross Press.

**Justin Limoli** is a second year M.F.A. Poetry candidate and teaches Writing and Rhetoric I and II at Columbia College Chicago. The poems taken are part of his current project *Bloodletting in Minor Scales*. He has been published in *Mangrove* and *Itch*.

**Amy Lipman** is an M.F.A. candidate at Columbia College Chicago. She received a B.F.A. in Theatre from the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. Her work has appeared in *The Deadline* and *Cicada*.

**Matt McBride's** latest chapbook, *Cities Lit by the Light in Photographs*, was released last March by H\_NGM\_NBKS. He is an assistant poetry editor for *Memorious* and works as a senior lecturer at Ohio State University. The last lines of the second stanza of his poem are from Tomas Tranströmer's "The Half-Finished Heaven."

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**Donnell McLachlan** is an undergraduate freshman at Columbia College Chicago and a Creative Writing Nonfiction major. His haiku, entitled "I Have Been Waiting," was selected for the Harrison Haiku project and is his first official publication.

**Joyelle McSweeney** is the author of five books of poetry, prose, and short plays, including the recent *Percussion Grenade* (Fence) and forthcoming *Salamandrine, 8 Gothics* (Tarpaulin Sky). She teaches at Notre Dame and edits Action Books.

**Jesse Mack** lives in Somerville, Massachusetts and attends the creative writing M.F.A. program at the University of New Hampshire. He teaches writing to adults and high school students in Boston and southern Maine. His poems have appeared in *Snow Monkey*, *The Alembic*, *Marco Polo*, and elsewhere.

**Jill Magi** is the author of four books including *SLOT* (Ugly Duckling Presse, 2011) and *Cadastral Map* (Shearsman Books, 2011). Her poetry/fiction/image hybrid work entitled *LABOR* is forthcoming in the fall (Nightboat Books), and recent work has been published by *Michigan Quarterly Review* and *Drunken Boat*. Jill works in text, image, and textile and has exhibited her work in galleries in New York and Chicago. She is a 2012-2013 Visiting Writer at Columbia College.

**Joseph Meads** hails from Peoria, Illinois and currently resides in Chicago where he studies creative writing at Columbia College. This is his first major publication.

**Brian Miles** lives and writes in Chicago. His poems have appeared in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Midwest Literary Magazine*, and *Everyday Other Things*.

**Laura E. Miller** will be receiving her Bachelor's in Creative Writing: Poetry from Columbia College Chicago in May 2013. She is from Louisville, Kentucky, and currently lives in Chicago with all of her cats. This is her first publication.

**David A. Moran**, born to Latino immigrants, is currently an undergraduate at Columbia College Chicago pursuing a major in creative writing. This is his first publication.

**Brian Mornar** lives in Chicago where he teaches in the English Department at Columbia College. *Little Red Leaves* published "Three American Letters" (an e-edition) in 2011, and recent work can be found in *American Letters & Commentary*, *VOLT*, and *Upstairs at Duroc*.

**Chris Neely** is originally from Orlando, Florida where he received a B.A. in English - Creative Writing from UCF. He is currently living in Chicago, working on his M.F.A. in poetry at Columbia College. This is his first publication.

**Mark Neely's** first book, *Beasts of the Hill*, won the FIELD Poetry Prize and was published by Oberlin College Press in 2012. His poems have appeared in *Gulf Coast*, *Indiana Review*, *Boulevard*, *Barrow Street* and elsewhere. He directs the creative writing program at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana.

**Kirk Nessel** is author of *Saint X* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2012). He has also published two books of short stories, *Paradise Road* (University of Pittsburgh Press) and *Mr. Agreeable* (Mammoth Books), as well as a book of translations, *Alphabet of the World* (University of Oklahoma Press), and a nonfiction study, *The Stories of Raymond Carver* (Ohio University Press). He is a recipient of the Drue Heinz Prize in Literature, a Pushcart Prize, and grants from the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts. His stories, poems, translations and essays have appeared in *The Paris Review*, *Southern Review*, *Kenyon Review*, *Gettysburg Review*, *American Poetry Review*, and elsewhere. He teaches creative writing and literature at Allegheny College, and is writer-in-residence at Black Forest Writing Seminars (Freiburg, Germany).

**David O'Connell's** poems have appeared in *Drunken Boat*, *Juked*, *Rattle*, and *Solstice*, among other journals. His work has been awarded fellowships from the Rhode Island State Council of the Arts.

**Daniel Scott Parker** was the 2010 Visiting Artist for the University of Georgia's Study Abroad Art Program in Cortona, Italy, and he holds an M.A. in Literature from Georgia State University. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *RealPoetik*, *Spork Press*, *great weather for MEDIA*, *Coconut*, and *NAP*. He lives in Chicago, where he is an M.F.A. Poetry candidate at Columbia College.

**Aaron Plasek's** writing has appeared in *>kill author*, *DIAGRAM*, *The Collagist*, *Alice Blue*, *Requited*, and other fine publications. He curates the No Perch Reading Series and lives in New York City.

**Alexis Pope** is the author of the chapbook *Girl Erases Girl* (Dancing Girl Press, 2013). Her poetry has appeared in *Anti-*, *iO*, *The New Megaphone*, and elsewhere. She lives

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in Ohio where she co-curates THE BIG BIG MESS READING SERIES and works as contributing editor for *Whiskey Island Magazine*.

**Meghan Privitello** is a poet living in New Jersey. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *NOÛ Journal*, *Sixth Finch*, *Redivider*, *Barn Owl Review*, *Bat City Review*, *Salt Hill Journal*, *Best New Poets 2012*, and elsewhere.

**Doug Ramspeck** is the author of four poetry collections. His most recent book, *Mechanical Fireflies* (2011), received the Barrow Street Press Poetry Prize. He teaches creative writing and directs the Writing Center at The Ohio State University at Lima.

**Kenyatta Rogers** is a 2012-2013 Visiting Poet at Columbia College Chicago. He's a Cave Canem fellow and his work is published or forthcoming in *Court Green*, *Reverie*, *Vinyl*, and *Cave Canem Anthology XIII*.

**Montreux Rotholtz** is from Seattle, lives in Iowa City, and is a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop. Her work appears most recently in *diode*, *LIT*, *The Cream City Review*, and is forthcoming in *Fence*.

**Andrew Ruzkowski** lives and writes in Chicago. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Willows Wept Review*, *analogpress*, *The New Writer*, *The Bakery*, *Black Tongue Review*, *The Camel Saloon*, *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Bone Orchard Poetry*, and *Eunoia Review*, among others. He loves Sriracha sauce.

**Jerome Sala's** latest book is *Look Slimmer Instantly*, from Soft Skull Press. His poems have recently appeared in *The Nation*, *Court Green*, *Plume*, *Eoagh*, *Milk Magazine*, and *The Brooklyn Rail*. He lives in New York City.

**Victoria A. Sanz** was born and raised in Miami, Florida. She is currently studying Creative Writing - Poetry and American Sign Language at Columbia College Chicago.

**Kayla Sargeson** earned an M.F.A. in Poetry at Columbia College Chicago, where she was the recipient of a Follett Fellowship. Her work has been anthologized in the national anthology, *Time You Let Me In: 25 Poets Under 25*, selected by Naomi Shihab Nye as well as *Voices from the Attic Volume XIV*, and *Dionne's Story*. Her poems also appear or are forthcoming in *5 AM*, *Chiron Review*, *Main Street Rag*, and *Prosody*: NPR-affiliate WESA's

weekly show featuring the work of national writers. Her chapbook *Mini Love Gun* is from Main Street Rag.

**Samantha Schaefer** is a recipient of the Follett Fellowship at Columbia College Chicago, earning her M.F.A. in Poetry. She is an editorial assistant to *Court Green* and the co-editor of *Black Tongue Review*, a collaborative literary arts magazine. Samantha is currently exploring multi-modal poetry and erasure poetics.

**Matthew Sharos** is a current M.F.A. candidate at Columbia College Chicago. This is his first publication.

**Brett Slezak** is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer and M.F.A. candidate in Creative Nonfiction Writing at Columbia College Chicago. His work has appeared in the *Blue Mesa Review Online*, *Ghost Proposal*, and *The Doctor T.J. Eckleburg Review*. He lives and writes in Chicago.

**Carmen Giménez Smith** is the author of the poetry collections *Odalisque in Pieces*, *The City She Was*, and *Goodbye, Flicker*. She lives in Las Cruces, New Mexico, where she edits *Puerto del Sol* and Noemi Press.

**Nick Sturm** is the author of the chapbooks *WHAT A TREMENDOUS TIME WE'RE HAVING!* (iO Books), *A Basic Guide* (Bateau), *Beautiful Out* (H\_NGM\_N) and, with Wendy Xu, *I Was Not Even Born* (Coconut). A full-length collection is forthcoming from H\_NGM\_N BKS in 2013. He lives in Tallahassee, Florida.

**Benjamin Sutton** lives in Louisiana. His poetry has recently appeared or is forthcoming in *Quarterly West*, *Sycamore Review*, *Barrow Street*, *Salt Hill*, *Third Coast*, and *Washington Square Review*, among others.

**Mathias Svalina** is the author of three books, most recently *The Explosions* from Subito Books. With Alisa Heinzman and Zachary Schomburg, he co-edits Octopus Books.

**Judith Taylor** is a native Chicagoan and has lived in Los Angeles for eons. She's the author of three poetry collections, *Curios* (Sarabande Books, 2000), *Selected Dreams from the Animal Kingdom* ( Zoo Press, 2003), and the forthcoming *Sex Libris* (What Books, 2013). She coedits *POOL: A Journal of Poetry*.

**Ryan Teitman** is the author of *Litany for the City* (BOA Editions, 2012), selected by Jane Hirshfield for the A. Poulin Jr. Prize. His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *Gulf Coast*, *Sycamore Review*, and *The Southern Review*. He was formerly a Wallace Stegner Fellow in Poetry at Stanford University and is currently the Emerging Writer Lecturer at Gettysburg College.

**Michael Paul Thomas** received his M.F.A. in Poetry from Syracuse University, where he was the Founding Editor of *Salt Hill*. He has been a recipient of a New Jersey State Council on the Arts Grant and has recently published poems in *The Greensboro Review*, *Slice*, and *Hotel Amerika*. He lives in Asbury Park, New Jersey, with his wife, the artist Rupa DasGupta.

**Eric Torgersen**, emeritus Professor of English at Central Michigan University, still lives in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. His most recent book is *Heart. Wood.* (Word Press, 2012). "Broken" is part of a collection to be called *In Which We See Our Selves: American Ghazals*; other ghazals have appeared in *Pleiades*, *New Ohio Review*, *New Letters*, *32 Poems*, *Zone 3*, *New Madrid*, *In Posse Review*, and elsewhere.

**Tony Trigilio's** newest book is *White Noise* (Apostrophe Books, 2013). He is a member of the core poetry faculty at Columbia College Chicago and co-edits *Court Green*.

**David Trinidad's** most recent book is *Dear Prudence: New and Selected Poems*, which was published in 2011 by Turtle Point Press. *Peyton Place: A Haiku Soap Opera* is forthcoming from Turtle Point in 2013. He lives in Chicago.

**J. A. Tyler** is the author of eight novel(la)s. He lives in Colorado and runs Mud Luscious Press.

**Jacob Victorine** is a performance poet and M.F.A. candidate at Columbia College Chicago, where he teaches undergraduate Writing & Rhetoric. A member of the 2011 Jersey City National Slam Team, his poetry has been featured on *IndieFeed: Performance Poetry*. His poems appear in places such as *The Bakery*, *PANK*, and *Muzzle Magazine*, for which he also writes book reviews.

**Sara Wainscott** has an M.F.A. in poetry from the University of Washington. She lives in Chicago and teaches writing at Columbia College Chicago. Her poems have appeared most recently in *Virtual Mentor*, *Poetry Northwest*, *The Journal*, and *Required*.

**Adele Frances Wegner** lives in Chicago and works at the National Alliance on Mental Illness of Greater Chicago. This is her first publication.

**Robert Alan Wendeborn** is a composition instructor at San Juan College. His reviews, interviews, and art have been featured in *Red Lightbulbs*, *HTMLGiant*, *The Lit Pub*, and *The Collagist*. These poems are from his unpublished manuscript, *The Blank Target*. Other poems from the series can be found at *>kill author*, *Sink Review*, and in the inaugural Queer Issue of *PANK*.

**Gabrielle Faith Williams** is a Chicago native studying poetry at Columbia College. In the fall of 2011 she won Columbia's Fourth Annual Library Haiku Contest.

**Phillip B. Williams** is the author of two chapbooks: *Bruised Gospels* (Arts in Bloom Inc) and *Burn* forthcoming from YesYes Books. His work has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Southern Review*, *West Branch*, *Callaloo*, *Tuesday: An Art Project*, *Court Green*, and others. He currently serves as poetry editor of *Vinyl Poetry* while attending Washington University in St. Louis for his M.F.A. in Creative Writing.

**Nicholas YB Wong** received his M.F.A. at the City University of Hong Kong and is the author of *Cities of Sameness*. He is a finalist of New Letters Poetry Award and a semi-finalist of the Saturnalia Books Poetry Prize. He is on the editorial board of *Drunken Boat* and *Mead: Magazine of Literature and Libations*.

**Abigail Zimmer** is an M.F.A. Poetry candidate at Columbia College Chicago. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Hoot* and *Black Tongue Review*.





## NEW POEMS BY

Rae Armantrout, Heather Christle, Adam Clay, Oliver de la Paz, Lisa Fishman, Johannes Göransson, Noah Eli Gordon, Matt Hart, George Kalamaras, Kirsten Kaschock, Krystal Languell, Jill Magi, Kenyatta Rogers, Jerome Sala, Carmen Giménez Smith, Mathias Svalina, Tony Trigilio, David Trinidad, J.A. Tyler, & many more.

**Columbia**  
COLLEGE CHICAGO

**COVER ART:**

*Friends to keep you warm, #29*

Izzyana Suhaimi, 2011

Embroidery and pen on paper, 30 x 40 cm