

Spring 4-1-2012

# Columbia Poetry Review

Columbia College Chicago

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columbiapoetryreview

no. 25

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## **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.

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*In memory of  
Irene McKinney  
(1939-2012)*





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# Near Midnight

And now the body is so bruised and punctured and the flesh is ragged from all the ports and lines into veins and transplants and biopsies that it becomes necessary to prop or lean it against any available surface or table edge, against countertops and cabinet doors, just to keep it upright, and now we find it is necessary to forgo ownership of the body, so that it becomes The Body, not my body, because the connection is damaged and distorted completely, and it is a fiction to pretend it is mine when it has so clearly been handed over to those who process it and test it, and it is so clearly an object for the equipment to scan and judge and calibrate; the x-ray, the CAT scan, the MRI need it to work on, they need it more completely than anyone else needs it. In its present condition, who would want it, who would ever consider embracing or even touching it, it is so clearly damaged and not functional. What can be done now, how could it move back into the realm of the living, or just the tolerable? What, in its present guise, is it for?

# Siding Half Up, Ladders Left Against Eaves

There's no jasmine,  
or cars rolling  
softly over gravel,  
and without a change  
to the color  
of the sky  
we're suddenly  
past the hour  
of smart decisions,  
and it's no longer  
enough to just sit  
on the sidewalk's  
corner with you.

With a hammer  
in one hand,  
I'm already across  
the street, searching  
room to room,  
waiting to find you  
with paint smeared  
across the skin  
of your shoulder.



---

# If With You, Overwhelmed

If with you, there will be many with outs; many  
of those alike and a waste, many or one, neither.

Currently, I consider the brunette  
as I daydream. Sitting cross-legged,  
she tells me to do the same,  
then justifiably talks of astrology  
outside the last bar of the night.

The fact of her beauty has already  
overwhelmed me with sadness.

I don't think Camus was drunk when he said  
*beauty is unbearable*. I am not drunk. She is glowing  
and I pray that this is not because she is drunk.

This sadness will be impossible to shake.

By leaving her to dream I again and again  
will choose you. I suppose this isn't romantic.  
No one should want to win this way.

# So Inconceivably Complex

My father made his first irreversible mistake at twenty-three, when he wedged the index and middle fingers of his left hand in the cogs and gears of a truck winch, twisted and ripped the digits off just below the joint. My grandparents each offered a finger of their own as a replacement.

The earth is a story of binding and breaking, and as the continents shimmied into their sandy shards, Gondwanaland left New Zealand from the deserted Australian bulk millennia before mammals ever touched it—bats the only warm-blooded bodies to naturally reach its limit.

I haven't been able to touch gin since I drank Screaming Purple Jesuses all night long at a costume party where I dressed as Ernest Hemingway. I changed the color of my beard with white flour to get that salt-and-pepper look, and carried a toy shotgun I stuck in my mouth for effect.

My father's second irreversible mistake was me. My mother told him she was pregnant while he was in the hospital for knee surgery—I don't know if my mother waited until he wasn't able to run or if it was coincidental. He is always in and out of hospitals for some reason.

While in New Zealand, I won a chest hair and sideburns competition during a '70s themed birthday party at a bar in Milford Sound. I seem to attract opportunities for costumes and alcohol, but I climbed a pipeline up a mountain the morning after.

My paternal grandparents argued, I would figure, every day of their married lives. Even in my dreams, I see them cleaning out the garage and yelling at each other. After my grandmother died, my grandfather promoted her to family saint. I don't know why they didn't divorce.

That's not true. My grandfather still knows she was a ball-buster. He sobs every time he hears "The Jitterbug." My grandmother always wanted a birdbath erected in the backyard. It never happened. Instead, bats swooped and picked off moths fluttering around the porch light.

New Zealand is split up into two main islands—the North and South—which, in my opinion, is how New Jersey should be divided. Not a fact. Just my thought. I also think Ernest Hemingway is a little overrated. I usually hate to admit this because he has avid fans.

My father had to relearn how to grip objects with his left hand, the nerves too sensitive to touch anything. When my mother, at the age of twenty, first met him, she didn't even notice they were missing. He always kept his hands balled-up on a table. The lost, hidden in plain sight.

The only trail that runs up the mountainside in Milford Sound is a hydroelectric pipe that harnesses melting glacial water at the peak into runoff lines. The city center buzzed from the plant's spinning generators. I wish my father had been there to explain each part to me.

The Maori—the original island people of New Zealand—have tales to explain every gorge and rock-face in their country. A boy pulled the islands from the water like a fish. A warrior carved a canoe to row into the underworld to retrieve his dead father. Heart-breaking. Complex.

My grandmother worked at the telephone company for fifty years. My grandfather twice retired from Sears Roebuck and Co. Auto Center. My mother was a cosmetologist at Gullo's Hair Salon. My father pulled extra shifts at the power plant so I could hike New Zealand.

I tramped the Kepler Track. I shaved the beard I grew in honor  
of my father, into the sideburns and goatee that won me a fifty dollar tab.  
I saw glowworms rouse and jewel gorse blooms along the stone beach.  
I lost myself among birds and bats and never wanted to be found.

There is a plant in the New Zealand jungle called Five Finger.  
Gin is a bottle of alcohol you won't see in my parents' liquor cabinet.  
My father went to Canada when he was a kid. My mother left  
the continent on a vacation to Hawaii. I was first in the Indian Ocean.

How will I remember my time there? You can spot my father staring off,  
his left hand open and flat on the arm of his easy-chair, the other scratching  
where his lost fingertips would be—doctors call it phantom pains.  
Some things don't grow back. Some things you don't lose a feeling for.

# X, Again

It's the same play from the mezzanine and the box.  
Positions of the follow spots and always present tense. The lead  
always undone by himself. But I went back,  
bought rush tickets every night  
if only to say it was nothing new. To recount  
the beats in the speeches, looks he sets through the crowd.  
He turns the attentions I give him like a mirror,  
sees the scene all at once, always for the first time—  
like a star struck boy. The medium-  
black sky of the stage never admitted for the muslin it is.  
He could throw any God up there, suspended  
in his own image. One who sees what he's made. Flawed. Spent  
too much time with the costume, not enough  
on the shoes. If even that God doesn't want to put them on  
again, slack in a corner without their shapers  
what collapse isn't permissible. I could lie to him  
convincingly without convincing myself first  
of how many faces it took to get here,  
all the parts it takes to play, look and sound right.  
Pretty, inconstant lovers in a secret room,  
petty advisors pulling curtain strings to hide themselves in court  
all at the same distance from the seats.  
I continue the false unities in order: time, wound  
like a rope and dropped. All mirrors  
faithful and backwards. The little moths that flit in the footlights,  
aren't the mouthless, silky kind I once thought  
but they'll still die in a day. Or maybe not and there's no room  
or time tonight for his mistakes to catch up. I'll abandon myself  
set those mistakes aside:

Forgive me my delusions. All things  
are a little worthwhile and all wise words wise  
until spoken. I'll tell the whole story, if someone'll hear it.  
Say the parts make a perfect whole and they should. Then tell it again.  
Say it was close, wasn't it? A shame and so  
much less.

---

# The Safety Word Is Ferry

This is the same sea where Icarus drowned,  
where sailors gave

new titles to each body. Jordan, Cassandra, Gregory,  
well we knew the view.

If you belonged to anything, you belonged to the sea.  
To its authority you were given,

at birth, the taste for salt. Among other adaptations  
we were designed for flight

and crafted vessels.  
Ocean, I write your poem with my back turned.

Already I can't hold you, I've scuttled  
something I do not want. Your bluster,

the picked gauntness of your cheeks. Held you  
at no more than your worth. Skeleton

crew laboring for keep, I've stolen again,  
left knots, replaced the rotted, proud hulks

or forgotten them. Driftwood, I've beveled your seams,  
I will nail you here.

# The Sun and the Cold Sea

It is not the dark that is killing me  
It is the sun

I can no longer bear the bright  
sea grass the blinding sand

& what I am left with  
is no song but some crazy longing

You would tell me  
*the greening of the day*

but I see the sun  
is a ruthless smudge

Why only in the drowning  
of the light  
is the world precious?

Walk to the gray shore  
to the tide pools  
gather the shells hoping  
to hear your voice

I will find  
in the sea glass  
some message—

Perhaps—what began cruelly



as jagged  
as broken

what I hold in my palm

small

as sea pods

holy as prayer beads

# Sunset on the Second Day

*after Aseem Kaul "Late Sonata"*

Because the mountain  
constructs its own wind  
and the function of wind  
is to move space  
not to fill it.

Because we are ill-equipped  
for the mechanism of grief  
for the precise gasp  
of this impulse  
toward violent touch.

Because bridges don't lead us across  
only over. We know what we know.  
The architecture of collapse  
is both certain and non-linear, though we imagine  
it can be designed.

We collect data, we graph, proving only  
that clouds exist to be frayed by wind.  
Because what splinters here is neither anguish nor altitude,  
but the ecstasy of vertigo, the permission  
to finally break apart.

---

# Firefly

We caught light  
in a jar below an oak,  
cracked it against a root—  
I've got cuts but they  
are soft

& warm,  
thin & clean against  
my index finger.  
I need you to kiss

them in a way  
that feels fragile;  
the knuckles

warm, radiating  
—I'm afraid

nothing burns after the lightning  
bugs drop back

into the air, gasping, golden  
flying ash.

# My jewelry felt so tight when I got home / I took it off

In the subway,  
my eyes burning—  
it's all the dry air

in the beginning of the platform  
& grey concrete leading  
into vibrations: oh the language  
we use in these *big cities*, blindfolding  
with black ties, finest darkness.

I choose a seat next  
to a couple, bright with amplified lust  
& fighting about abandonment:  
you don't love me anymore,  
so leave me.

I bury my eyes into  
both palms—they're bloodshot  
& brittle, full of urban dust,  
see red swans appearing and disappearing.

When I lift my head  
the whole train is swollen  
& my silver bracelet band  
bursts right off my wrist. Is this

how far we expand / take off

# I can't wait to lose my baby teeth

At night twenty years ago  
I would wet the bed and wake  
up in strange places / my closet  
had a wood pattern just like a vampire, the teeth slender,  
lean / bitter. I saw sharpness everywhere & in all things  
a piercing gun loaded with earrings. Above the alphabet poster,  
a white wall nearly dying from the lack of affection

it received and I, a young blonde hero, come to wish it Goodnight.  
Goodnight, dear wall. The potential of the inanimate to be real /  
breathing: what a great idea and so important

& what a way of clearing our mouths of innocence, a tooth & a root  
detaching from a tiny pit dug especially for it, the lack of *wounding*.  
I would rinse with saltwater, spit pink tendrils into a shallow  
sink, save it. Save it & keep it. This tiny white of me, enamel of me,  
I was barely bearing its departure, holding it below a pillow below my cheek, saving it  
until it was replaced.

# 1999

I clip my bangs back with a plastic butterfly. Under pajamas, I wear a sports bra, white with tearing elastic, take it off only to shower.

I hate my body this way that it has become, need compression to bind the newness flat into me. I'll say the same set of prayers tonight and forgive myself for the AOL chat rooms. Lord, forgive me the chat rooms. I am only an observer; I am only a witness to the events. I am only just now learning about Bill Clinton, and from this, the idea of contempt, that one can be "held" in it, a cradle of derision in the swaying arms of a courtroom. Contempt in a classroom, also a kind of holding.

: The recoil from his shotgun caught him straight in the face, breaking his nose, causing it to bleed. His face disturbed several students, who told reporters afterward that he looked as though he had been drinking blood.

Consider intentionally falsifying statements. In bed, I run my tongue across my braces which are rubber-banded in black & gold, fall asleep on my stomach in an effort to suppress.

---

# Colorado / Perennial

Feels like daytime on my muscles; early teen, quite thin.

I went to see *The Secret Garden*, waited for the campfire scene, pulled smoke near until I breathed it. I mean I really breathed it / you. Our place in the theater is overgrown & petals are falling off down the aisles: it looks like a gun just happened in the movie. Your gun is a ghost silhouetted on a screen & played out in slow motion. This should be menacing.

I hit the floor heavy with thorns; crawl on my palms collecting tiny spikes—so small my palms, tendons sharp and cut up. Right behind, you're grabbing my leg & pressing your cheek to my calf & kissing. I'll always

let this happen, I hope always—my hands brittle flowers, breaking all over.

## from 'victimology'

I'm limp for replaying my mistakes about you  
let me wear your rape like a piece of nostalgia  
I fret no one suffers the carpentry of your jean skirt  
you cried because the fire was beautiful  
not because you loved your house  
so many other buildings the flames would never reach  
I sought a poster of your shadow in Colorado  
remember the bench and my hardness  
chalk outline of a rubber chicken  
be snarky so your passed-away kittens rise like Botox  
boy-fingered by androids drunk while I eat used cigarettes  
only naked during total eclipses gang-banged by *Reading Rainbow*  
singing causes infection you kamikaze jump roper  
ballerina of dime stores and sugarless candy  
your skull grew frowns obsessing my weight  
I drank a tuxedo to belch near your corner  
stapled your socks to my feet like buttery sex lives  
don't lie about PMS to avoid my homosexual masterpiece of a bike  
I deflated sirens in your backyard cloggy and helical  
you heavy practitioner of context like Alzheimer's  
putty the parish type of sweet all cruciform  
my salvation depends upon your purse goring sunsets  
show me those elbows from an early age or I'll get rigor mortis  
and picture you screwing popsicles to canned laughter  
subject to obituaries bad posture I hope I die alone  
purchase myself skinny the shape of your contagion  
a sleeping shot about turbines Armageddon is  
wax your feet bleeding sidewalks TVs  
I straddle a tomahawk in every dream large breasted men



hurry to anoint us it's hell for comedians bedpans ahum  
thank you for setting my sideburns on fire  
because you did fail kindergarten  
marry me with chemicals near a gross fountain  
as your fishnets slip violins and Edward Gorey  
slap an orange on each knee crap a binoculars  
bravo a terrarium I only compromise in jail  
know I come bulimia folded and scribe your history in wood  
being touched is a pet peeve a diet of polish bullets and John Zorn  
I need a crowbar to spread your legs

# In Memory

When she was still able she walked  
for miles, covering the same ground each time,  
staking her territory. The border collie  
just ahead of her, two figures slipping  
in and out of the sea fog that banked  
the roadside most mornings.

I saw her for the last time  
in her garden, ripping handfuls of weeds  
and cutting back all the spent blooms.  
She'd spend hours out there, browned by the sun  
but never really warmed by it. Yet this was how  
she needed to remember herself, fingers  
black with dirt, bare arms plunging to the shoulders  
into the phlox and tangled poppies.

---

# Umbrella Photo Poems

1.

The skinny arms.  
The baggy shorts.

It's quite a surprise  
to find an old man  
reading the newspaper  
under a peach silk parasol.

2.

My Cassandra's name  
is Theodore.

She sits in the park  
interpreting dreams for free  
in order to pay  
for mortuary school.

She's very knowledgeable  
about such things.

If you wish to find her,  
look for the rainbow-striped  
umbrella that's always with her  
like Joseph's coat of many colors  
and say I sent you.

3.

An orange disc  
out wandering  
like a comet.

4.

There goes an enlightened beauty  
with great posture.

Her umbrella is just the extension  
of her slender body.

A halo of lime green sky  
springs from the correctness of her thoughts  
and follows her around.

It comes complete with its own bluebirds.

---

# Time Traveler's Potlatch

For *Rousseau*: A leopard of multi-colored spots.

For *Edward Hopper*: A perfect piece of lemon meringue pie in a diner at midnight where the only other customer is Greta Garbo reading a book.

For *John Cage*: 7 empty birdcages, each corresponding to a musical note. Some are elaborate Victorian wicker affairs; some of simple bamboo.

For *Nate Hawthorne*: An electric train, a board game based on the Salem witch trials, and a bottle of fine sherry.

For *T.S. Eliot*: A crate of peaches with a note that reads: "I dare you."

For *Laura Riding*: A dictionary and a whip.

# Saturday-night Dream

I dreamt I couldn't find the blue blanket

So I gathered by the kitchen sink

On special assignment

My memory is

The worst thing that could happen

Pink carnations always beam white in a certain light

Not worse than a hole in the fuselage

No not worse than seeing the topmost blue

While blindly groping for the oxygen mask

I dreamt Robert stood at the end of the bed

My mouth was stuck open and I saw him as if I were awake

I wanted to tell him that the oven was on

The good vase is in the cabinet above the range

There are peaks in the egg whites

I will make a good cake

from *Showgirls: The Movie* in Sestinas

## Discarded

An international flight, a year and a half after the release of *Showgirls*: Elizabeth Berkley is sitting in first class; a man steps in to take the seat next to hers, glances down, “Excuse me.” An hour into the trip, he dons headphones for the in-flight movie: *Showgirls*. She braces herself, waits for the light bulb to go on above his head. Minutes pass. She can’t help but look at herself

naked on his little video screen embedded in the forward seat, a self working hard, giving her all for a part. *Stop production, get released from your contract*, she’d like to whisper in her own ear, back in time, on the set full of jealous, scheming girls who had, she felt, absolutely no class. The man reaches across for a coffee, smiles, goes back to the movie. He’s halfway through it, the scene where Molly and Nomi

exit the stardust after Nomi’s “Goddess” debut, Elizabeth thinks, *He’s clueless that’s me!* and wants to poke him: “Look, I’m right HERE!” but talks herself out of it. *What good was suffering through those reviews—“The worst movie of all time”—if I can’t even get recognized?* She pops a Xanax to release the stress. *At least with the hundred thou it paid I can fly first class.* She watches Nomi giving James the brush-off on

screen. *I don’t care what anyone says*, she thinks, *I look damn good on film, and I’m sorry, Nomi is a complex character—she cries out know me, but the critics just didn’t get it.* Elizabeth remembers Glenn Plummer as a classy guy, recalls how the line “I have a problem with pussy” made him self-conscious, how he was the only cast member to call after the release to offer kind words in the wake of critical devastation. The movie,

Elizabeth notices, is also being viewed across the aisle: a young gay likes the movie's baroque visual style (vivid colors, symbol-laden environment). He laughs on and off (which disturbs her). *Why didn't I see this when it was first released?* he wonders. *Did the Molly character just say "Let's go Nomes"? I get it—Gnome Me!* He howls with delight. Elizabeth is waiting to feel the pill hurl herself toward sleep. She's annoyed that someone so clearly déclassé

got seated in her cabin. The young gay is ecstatic he was upgraded to first class (a lucky computer mix-up), where watching a hilariously bad movie is just, well, better. On screen, Nomi gets into Molly's car, abandoning her former self: the naïve girl desperate for James's approval. She moves on into her new showgirl life. In row 3, Elizabeth Berkley muses *Why me?* The man to her left is engrossed, though dumb to her fame. She presses the release

button on the cushy chair, reclines. Tension releases. *You can't beat a Xanax in first class.* (This thought floats through her mind.) *Why did they hate me so much in that movie?* She turns on her own screen, begins to drift off, watching her younger, unwitting self.



*from* On the Tongue: Two Ariettas

# Blood Orange

Hide of a rhino pitted,  
rough; volcano body  
aching to erupt.  
Your stands beckon  
on the drive to Pompeii.  
Strange how a hand's  
squeeze can be  
in sweetness or in anger.  
How one grasp yields  
juice and another, lava.

# Oyster

Little knot  
of salt-muscle,  
hovering  
in your shell. You're  
an unmade bed,  
quick tip  
& swallow.  
Later, only  
the rumor  
an ocean was here.

---

# At the Age of Nineteen My Twin Brother Tells Me He Is Moving to India

As a child  
he thought  
you could press

a snowflake  
into the static  
pages of a book

the same way  
you could press  
a flower

and that snowflake  
would stay intact,  
indelible, true;

picture postcard  
representation  
of both its life and death.

Now as an adult  
this way  
of thinking

gives him  
a certain separation  
anxiety

because he still believes  
it, still insists on  
muscling his way in

with his heart.

With enough money and clothes  
you can settle down

anywhere you want  
when you grow up.  
My brother's name

is easy enough to pronounce.  
You can translate it.  
In all likelihood

he's in love  
with you  
or someone else.

---

# Indian Girl

Kehli's brown legs round knees and old eyes her badges  
numerous and colorful on her tight green uniform  
clapping along at the flag her eyes were ages older  
and found me in the crush of brown and green gangly girls.  
Kehli danced to her father's drums at the circle  
and I watched as the fringe on her skirt teased at  
her round brown knees her dark feet skidding into  
the dirt at the camp grounds where I met her.  
Kehli made a key chain from plastic bands and her  
thin pink lips spread over sweet white teeth as she  
gave it to me to keep as a sign of friendship.  
Kehli and I slept in her sleeping bag together  
on the top bunk in the brown cabin and I felt her round knees  
and laughed with her down in her deep old soul eyes.

## *from* The Cuckold's Survivor Manual

When you decide to rearrange your life and find that a neighbor has left footprints all over your wife's carpet, don't despair. Lay down a wet towel, folded in two, and steam it gently with a hot iron. If that fails, use a felt tip pen and treat the bare threads individually. Remember: the more often a wife's rug is shaken, the longer it will live. Dirt trapped underneath grinds down the threads.

---

# Holiday Weekend

He's dragging his Mediterranean tongue  
around the perimeter of my wife's lullaby,  
like Hector's body around the gates of Troy.

She's arching off the bed, learning to speak  
with her hips, saying: *drink from this ceramic  
bowl, Achilles*. I whimper, *Helen, don't*,

into the strip of cloth wedged between my teeth.  
The worst part is not how my hands are cuffed  
to the arms of the antique rocking chair

we picked out together. The worst part is not  
the *oh* her mouth makes as he tugs brightly-colored  
gasps out of her like hundred-dollar

pashmina scarves, or how her vowels ricochet  
off the ceiling like wedding rings rifle-shot  
into a tin can. No, the worst part is how my body

betrays me, how my heart slams in time  
with their rhythm, how cozy I am playing  
second fiddle in the soundtrack of my life.

# Lust in Translation

When she answers the phone in the middle of the night  
then disappears with three scarves and a bull whip

When I am blindfolded in the corner, and she is the sound  
of a zipper being undone

When my ears are seashells filled with her oceanic moans

When I am a lamp, she sticks in the basement

When her chair is empty at the breakfast table

When she leads me by the nose through a briar patch  
on a barbed wire leash

When she takes off her panties in the front seat  
just before entering the shoe store

When she holds my wrist and presses the lighter into my palm  
and whispers *this is what it feels like this this this*



# Toying with Barbie

you girls

greased the microphone, the stethoscope, lined her waist with Velcro authority,  
marched her heels off the ground to jobs *you'll* never have:

Astronaut Barbie, Surgeon Barbie, Pilot Barbie,  
Miss America Barbie, Fashion Model Barbie,  
Olympic Gold Medalist Barbie, Rock Star Barbie,  
Presidential Candidate Barbie, CEO Barbie,  
NASCAR Barbie, *American Idol* Barbie.

you screamed for lesser accessories,  
Barbie, her palms would protest, were it not for the plastic,  
elbows arched in an unrequited handshake,  
her fingers closed, yet thumbs wide for hand jobs,  
your fingers hushed  
the *no, no, no* of her forever smile:

college drop-out Barbie, middle manager Barbie,  
bus driver Barbie, McDonald's cashier Barbie,  
sewage plant officer Barbie, fluffer Barbie,  
shrimp farmer Barbie, chimney sweep Barbie,  
customer service Barbie, Walmart greeter Barbie.

you chucked her in her plastic house,  
ass up in her American dream next to a dickless husband,  
because she had it all,  
and you are a stupid, stupid girl.

you girls cut her hair with scissor-straight envy,  
monstrosity to her symmetry,  
her hair fell in ropes, perfect as her white picket fence,  
on your brown Payless shoes, because you are Plain-Jane and Supercuts,  
and she is pretty, pretty, prettier than you.

done playing house *you'll* never have,  
with an eye at the back  
you left the door open

for us boys

to snatch her up with big boy hands,  
shuck her big day clothes, and get to the meat,  
for a more real crime,

to vice her head between our fingers,  
squeeze the pretty out,  
look her in the eye shadow, bend her lens and say:

*look at me,  
look at me,  
in my oval monstrosity.*

to burn her hair with our father's match,  
book-burning fire, witch-burning fire, the synthetic smoke of the fire of men.

and still too pretty, the head must come off,  
pull twist from side to side, dislodge the baby tooth,  
her head popped off like a chicken bone,  
because she is pretty, pretty, prettier than us, and we are strong.

a gangrened American dream  
we stepped away from the bloodless crime,  
with an eye at the back  
for our sisters to stumble upon, seamlessly,  
our partners in crime,

you girls

## *from* Meadow Slasher VI

I keep a good hurley bat near the bed  
in case of intruders. In case of what else?  
A cyclone of midges at the pitcher's face  
& it's still Ohio out here.  
So who comes in when you sleep?  
I want *no scary*—  
that's the American version dubbed.  
Press here for bludgeon,  
press here for steam, & here  
for marauding-type shit.  
Ok, the rains are coming  
so you better get your boots  
out. What kind of tripwire have you been  
constructing in the off hours?  
*Your courteous Lights in vain you wast,*

The white city drops into a sinkhole.

So, let's get sent down there awhile—

chew up our fingernails, watch the lava pour in

like baked potato butter. Would you mind pulling my

shirt off? I seem to have

crushed my arm in the carousel.

Step down, sad sentry, into the

submarine lazing in the harbor with

no battle to attend.

Bring your pencilists, storyboarders,

& the child draughtsman.

# Thesis Statement

In the beginning God created the June bug,  
a way to name your child after something ugly.

A way to put a month in skin.

& God made the cockroach because He knew we  
were going to make the atomic bomb.

*You can't erase everything* God whispered into a tin can  
attached to a string that was attached to another tin can.

The string went south & wrapped itself around a sparrow's neck.

The sparrow, a mother of six, while suffocating slowly,  
visualized a pie chart detailing the percentage of her love  
for each of her babies.

Six pieces of unequal love. *Still* she thought

*there was enough for each.*

The string went further south & I was looking  
for the tin can, looking for a burning bush, a note  
that I was someone worth thinking about.

& Joseph said *I did not have sexual relations with that woman.*

& Jesus was like *You're fucking kidding, right?*

& the dinosaurs didn't say anything, they were too busy  
laughing at the size of trees.

& my lover woke up & I was already inside her.

—This was yesterday.

—This was a good day.

—*This this this this this feeling* she said.

Dreams, she meant dreams.

& God said *We called it the best feeling ever.*

& after making love on the green shag rug,  
her stomach was the color of a rug burn,  
fresh enough to kiss, hot enough to burn my cheek against.

# Sodom & Gomorrah Sitting in a Tree

I never think about my heart when I use a can opener. *She said she loved me* Jesus said, His head in his hands but He could still see because of the holes because of the nails that used to be in the holes in His hands because of the tree stump in the shape of a cross. Salt shakers are overrated. I know some gay people & most of them smell nice. *Pretty girl* I say to a boy who gave me a pill that made everything two & then everything two all the craters on the moon. There are so many craters on the moon so I don't count them. Maybe God was sad that His love was so broad so He shrunk it down the best He could with a jar of clay. I blessed His shoulder blades, counted nineteen freckles down His spine. He wondered how He could create so many different ways to touch someone. It's like that saying I just made up: *There are so many different ways to moan a touching mouth.* I am happy love invites itself into bedrooms, glass elevators, the tail ends of fruit flies. It was morning when I told her *You always smell like a wintered tree.* We rode around Eden & then I lost her. I climbed the largest tree but the sun only gave me fake rivers, clouds touching the tips of the ground. I have been looking for days or weeks or months or years or decades or even when decades become easier to add than years. It is hard being sexy after eating lo-mein soaked in MSG. What could anyone possibly do with an entire pillar of salt?



---

# But Andrew

I'd break your track pants in two  
and see myself inside  
but you believe in God in a way

I can't bring myself to capitalize on:  
Daddy's little politico leafleting streets  
with Alaskan pageant bombshell day or night

agendas, but the steel-toed size of your work boots, damn,  
I don't think you're scared to die  
Andrew, my hairline recedes with yours

as you point out the obvious heart throb—  
the type of guy whose lips are good for lipstick  
to smudge against, your Ma must think

christening but I'm too slobbered on  
to have kept the bones for this kind of weather  
(what your gloves lining must feel)

# Maybe It Is Useless to Be Having This

Remember me telling you about that daycare  
and some of the mothers' discomfort with my position  
because I'm a man, so naturally a cocksucker

since kinkier mouths automatically  
get custody, *mine and yours* is so shaken  
up and iced in white laboratories,

separate, who would be mine to take?  
Whose womb would we evenly use?  
I haven't touched one in years

and she has the ugliest tattoos and doesn't her hair  
look a little thin to you and those nail beds, I'm confused.  
I'm starting to feel like a real asshole

having all this control  
seems so like us, waiting for our vasectomies  
at the mailbox and getting nothing but junk.

---

# Love Poem

In a Tapas bar I'm alone eating food you hate—cracker stained with black squid, spoonful of sea urchin, this tiny plate of eggs and olives.

I love food that is all sharp edges, brackish and salt, iced mineral water that burns the tongue and hisses in its glass bottle.

Like the silver grape our daughter stole at a liquor store fruit display, so transparent it was irresistible, miniature crystal cracking

in her palm. Now I tip a teaspoon of salt onto my plate. Remembering how after

you left I slipped my hands in the pocket of your jacket, then bent closer, tongued its empty cool silk.

Do you think I'm talking about your body?  
Do you think I'm talking about sex, my fork splitting metal on a plate,

you eating too fast with your fingers?  
Do you think I'm talking about marriage or

our bedroom, windows rain-flushed and dark, or  
our meeting here, now, naked on the kitchen's cold linoleum?

# Reasons We Should Be Together

You let me paint your front door green.  
I let you put your initials in me  
like a tree or wet cement.  
This evening we tried to pull  
tall posts out of thick stone  
in your front yard. My brother  
said the best strategy was to wrap  
chains around the wood and jerk-force  
them out with our station wagon.  
He once saw our cousin put his truck  
in drive and rip the chain clear,  
the metal braid horrific as a whip.

---

# A Late Omen

I thought  
of falling in love  
as “tendering one’s resignation,”  
  
another hopeful fuchsia  
blasted by the heat.

We start out with so many chances.

The tomatoes, vining peas and mint that I always forget to water.  
Already fading to the past.

Tonight, you practice  
“Black Magic Woman,”  
hands gentle with the bass.

Your body rocks along,  
letting the line grow along your fingertips.

I thought of you as another plant I could only kill—

This year, one of our fuchsias is thriving, disregarded,  
at the bottom of the balcony.

“It won’t get better unless you leave it alone.”

If I could travel back in time,  
I would be a thunderous prognostication,  
vined in pink and purple flowers,  
curled collars and searching stamens

and say,

“Resign yourself, for I  
have been  
sent from  
the future  
to tell it like  
it is.”

---

# Doubtless

On the back porch at sundown, we rock among  
the fig and the redbud,  
their interleaved branches  
clicking and clacking,

an umbriphilous patois.

“The light here has weight.”

It carries you within it like a flame.

When I laugh, you know, it’s because I have a secret:

I overcame my doubts  
by observing my own motto.

*Proceed with caution, but always proceed.*

In essence, I doubted my doubts.

And now I will show you the wages of doubt—  
a still-green desiring  
and this benediction—

When the wind rises,  
and the branches are broken,  
and you, poor flame, are bent to your wick,

I will form a lantern from my hands,  
fingers ringed into a chimney

to steady your light,  
to make a fortress for flame.



# The Proletariat's End

Printed pages shooting out of a pickup truck  
spiral down the open road. The eyes  
of the bearded man behind the wheel,  
all sclera. White noise on the radio,  
a fall of lambs fills the afternoon sky.  
Roll credits. A riot breaks out in the theater.

# Call and Response

Mirrors increase  
being in  
the images  
they return.

An Earth feels  
one measure absenter  
as senders like us  
vanish from glass.

Why we call  
pills medicine  
in the cabinet.

# What in the Remains Is Undertaken,

what is unaided in speech, what to covet, what would I die for, what stands in for the totality of my world, what form does it take, where shall I go, how to undermine this with something as real as washing dishes and looking in a handheld mirror at the thinning hair or the face that looks back nothing like envisage it looks and leaving the light off in the bathroom to read in natural light entering my life on a calendar with reminders that go off the day of or before in this house I rent I have rented so many homes or apartments or lesser spaces there is nothing to show for those places other than what I may have said then on paper carried with me when I packed what I had predicted for myself what I then called the future that somehow now seems genuine manifest and so I look into the mirror at my face and I have 'made it' here is the clarity at last the revelation the tuned-into-the-self moment not a moment more than a moment it's an era of clarity I declare even if there is so much that is wrong that I would breach the door in anger or drunk or forget the spare key beneath the doormat or waken thinking my dead father in the room with me or my mother in the room whose shape is unfamiliar every year when I visit her or the woman in the bed next to me hoarding the sheets or then the debts waken me and I barefoot into the kitchen to drink water risen from an ancient aquifer and while I satiate I see now the moon is low now and I remember my dead cat I buried in a birch box in the desert is out there I cried while I did it and remember the phrase child father to the man for these remains unaided coveted no chance to die for it the naivety of it all I knew the form then and where

## Silence = A Minor Delusion

The dead clapping dead little leaf-clapping seeping through insulated walls. A piece of hell in this. Drought-shocked limbs arrayed in winter into the spring—not enough water to drop the burden onto the courtyard dirt. Belling traincrossing. Dog locked into a yard who guts out when the baleful hits here, in the silences between. Smaller: the hum of the stereo amplifier not listened to, the electric devices in the bathroom recycling through charges, the ducts filling with the pushed filtered waft of central air: the entire cataleptic management of environment that is the house. Beyond drywall and panel is desert.

*Desertion.*

An opening.

The paths around the building allow movement in time to the pile of waste. Outside is inside. One wishes to balance “things,” but one bolts the door at night. The doorbell tones melancholic interruption. The vacation is seriously planned. Waits until affordable. One worries money, one starts exercise again, one watches an online auction. The yellow delivery truck and then doorbell. Heated excess, thermostat too high. The juniper drops sharp seeds; one always steps barefoot on these. Always waiting for rain and sweaters in the crawlspace. Awaiting activation expecting dominion over slunkness. Expecting the world to be equated to a diminutive sham. The air is chemic—loaded with the vivacious flower & its mnemonic bee. Must stop—somewhere between symbolic & literal order. All surrender to earth, not just death, the mechanics of suffering, the unresolved childhood of it, the moderate crisis of eyesight in this, the cat chewing the knuckle of this. Soft center, no bloodbath lit, this—*of it, in this, of this, this*—the astonishing gathering stench of the genitive. Break along

as a copy. Induce yourself, the undeniable unnamable you creeping in now bluffing for a favor, to give purpose, not exercise. In the middle ground nothing is merely subjective, nothing only determined by structure.

One lives in the between as a speaking fog of words.



---

## *from* Sunporch

If we had a temple, these birds would be its frontier

If we had a cartoon hound sidekick, he yawns

If wind enters through a screen, she removed her shirt

–

Given such a tremendous

sail,

who alive would mind

the smallness

of our boat

They hollowed out the elementary school  
hung it with condensed lace  
There is coffee flavored with almonds  
and pieces of date

not an extract but  
the actual and small, water  
acquired from the ice

crude parts  
which  
in a radio make air land-  
scape some-  
where xxx  
of any epoch is yet even more so  
cast



By when you read this our language will have changed. I stand in a ship-in-a-bottle  
fedora, as the house a party has been through. Out my window, a blond child her kite  
sidewalk-skitters in a low and focused wind past men laying tiles in the square man  
knocking his forearm cast against a rail, man knotting a sprig her uncle with hands  
deep in a bag man re-soling boots in a gigantic tank of water boys with sacks on sticks  
for nets force pigeons in with him

Day passing out. A window.

Leaflets.

The marble wind

electric trolley. I have been hired to pretend to photograph

# Meditation on Vampires vs. Zombies

How I love this apocalyptic  
desire of wanting to see  
fortunes crushed, wanting stockbrokers  
to jump. *Couldn't I have been Lorca for  
5 minutes in 1929?*  
Let's trample their zombie logic  
of ruining desire  
and then, vampire,  
gone are the unfortunate ones for  
they, in their dream life,  
remember nothing but the sea foaming  
against this Egyptian landmass,  
the flesh as a hunk of sand or  
sarcophagus torn from its  
historical context, concave  
and hacking and hacking  
the hacked viruses.

No, we're not that.  
We're brazen, poor blood thirst.  
Your topsy-turvy  
head bobs like a buoy  
above reasoning skills. The horizon's  
white neck pumps like a machine,  
pumps steam.  
Sea salt quenches nothing.  
The fish quench nothing.  
Our squints quench nothing.  
In fact, rubbing blood into wound,  
into want only worsens the craving  
for what it cannot give more.

---

Therefore, I prefer the wilderness even if  
it's prettier when expensive rain  
rains on expensive  
architecture and the streets  
beautify themselves because they're  
stranded wearing loose silks  
and braided jewelry  
and when you wipe your face on the veined  
marble steps of the New York Stock Exchange  
there will be no army of civil servants,  
no justice of the peace  
handing out Russian furs and vodka.

We've been meditating in the audience  
of thought for a long time.  
I'm going to pull you toward me.  
I'm going to tear the days apart  
from their years,  
rip the paper heads  
off paper money.

## A Munsters' Breakfast

Herman's big on corn, he likes to stuff his mouth  
with Kix and practice his diction.  
Grandpa and Eddie go for Trix, which pinks  
the milk as though it's tinged with blood.  
Only blond bland Marilyn will dare  
approach the Cheerios. They float in her bowl  
like small life-savers—enough she thinks  
to save all the passengers on the model *Titanic*  
Eddie is building for his school project  
down in the lab, complete with dry-ice berg  
and a looped tape of screams Lily has  
taken great pains to record for him.

Lily sips only some root-bark tea. Her man  
prefers her wraithlike. Tonight's a full moon.  
She worries about Eddie's growth spurt;  
Herman crisply articulates what's on her mind:  
"You come home right after school, Eddie."  
The boy drains the last stained drop  
from his crock and wipes his moustache.  
"We'll work on the levers for tilting the decks,"  
Grandpa entices. Eddie's eyes flare like torches.  
Then everyone vanishes into their day.

# To Knit a Monster

And when we're alone beyond storefront sitting on the floor in piles of paintings and glass and string you say I AM GOING TO KNIT A MONSTER AND MAIL IT TO MISSOURI. I know what you mean, there are days when even I want to make a monster outside myself, how I want to take all these strings inside me out through my mouth. How it's absolutely not a joke, and of course I say WHAT THE HELL IS YOUR MONSTER GOING TO DO IN MISSOURI and you say THERE ARE SO MANY BROKEN HEARTS I MEAN BRICKS AROUND US and god I know it hurts. Every time I drop a brick down into place. How the holes are so infrequently full of the right shapes, how your favorite bricks are purple and how I always try to use the purple bricks to make your morning face but there are so many colors, there are so many colors and sometimes I don't know if I am in the warehouse or at home or behind the desk at our storefront office. But I play the game hard for you and I make your face prettier I think each time.

# A Brick Through Her Art

When I play Tetris sometimes the bricks fall apart. I put wooden boards on the ground. I have a special net. I try to keep everything together, centralized, a nervous system of color. A color is all that keeps us. When we're finished, I will hire your sister to paint the windows of the storefront. When that's finished, I will pay a stranger to throw a brick through her art. Nothing means NOTHING. I say WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU ALL GET BETTER. I will pay a stranger to throw a brick through your heart. I will take apart my book. I call my book MY HEART. I finish all these poems and then I erase my hard drive. I drive hard so you'll never know how much it hurts to have a heart. Sometimes it sounds like I'm putting a knife into you, sometimes it's only a sound.

# Burn My Body

You became fire.  
Eyes blinded through the fog, the rain.  
Water fell from the sky on that long drive to Anacortes.  
It misted our skin as we gathered in the parking lot.  
We stopped at the Donut Haus for lattes and sixteen doughnuts.  
At the ferry dock in black and white weather  
there you were boxed and labeled in Janice's hand.  
Our ferry broke down on the dock as the rain ceased.  
*Did you know that Washington has the largest ferries in the world?*  
No.

Gazing outward into evergreen waters  
I watched seagulls float by in ocean spray.  
Gazing inward at our roots.  
It was Friday in Friday Harbor  
as we rose onward into the wake.  
*Did you know that the San Juan Islands  
have one of the most unique ecosystems in the world?*  
No.

John's boat slowed its engine in Griffen Bay,  
where in 1967 you, my father and Davey used to sail,  
net crab, and drink every weekend.  
Our one hundred and sixty fingers collided  
in a circle on the stern.  
A prayer to Creator, a prayer to the Sound.  
All heads bowed while mine gazed  
ahead into the salt-water green.

A dolphin's fin emerges in and out in front of me.  
Its' medicine, a gatekeeper fusing the worlds  
delivering you to flicker again.  
Dumping you overboard,  
soot softly milky in the green abyss.  
You become luminous submerging below us.

A trail of plum rich dahlias float above you,  
as you become water,  
to evaporate into air  
and to fall into soil.

*Do you know the story of the caterpillar?*

*Yes I do.*

You parted the sun the same way  
you used to part my hair.



---

# Landfield Landscape

Voices bruise behind flashlights  
mouths of canteens ends of gun barrels  
armed to each other we are singing  
throats swollen ourselves over lockjawed  
switchbacks

upwards dripping the crumble of steps  
stone-lipped outcrops and upcountry  
deadweed. At daylight we have to make camp  
have to sleep through the heat above  
the pounding ravine

wild dogs running wild  
between the legs of wild sheep

fluid

colors swollen morning in iridescent  
washing.

No creature can learn his own heart to hold.

You wake  
to cold dreams made of shadows.  
You see everything at dark.

Look at the flat palm of heaven on the face  
of the earth.

Repeats the darkness to himself. He snaps the match  
embers cracked and broken open. Look at his face  
in the wind-tattered flames. I said look

iron sky burnt chassis of bare trees. I said look kid

you don't make friends with mercy.

---

# deforestation

applecore applecore

you are building playgrounds in the dark

you are uprooting power lines    throwing them into the sun  
    you are the darkness that erupts    to eat what mimics you

you are planting thumbscrews as seeds    hearing newborn rabbits cry  
from the jaws of a german shepherd

    this is the field in which i've buried  
    all bright fiery things  
    the earth is warm as you overturn it  
    but nothing is ablaze  
        no things illuminated

    fire without warmth is a hole without the earth

applecore applecore

you are an occasion for digging

you bury like you build  
    final steps to be    covered in    skin

# the woods

we keep an unfinished  
forest under the bed

growing in broken branch  
and greying moss

blood            less  
and old

bulletcasings roll along  
its caked and cracking creekbeds  
wheelwells flower from  
its dry and brittle ferns

the crystal skeletons of hairless mammals  
make nests in the petrified oakleaves  
paving the salted floor

(your woodknot hands underneath pillows  
my pebblegranite fingers in your mouth)

we form cloudshapes of ideas and shed  
our futures in nickelplated rain

heavy enough  
to carve letters  
through a sagging mattress

and force a way down the throats of roots

they drink us  
in words

we bet eyelashes  
on what answers  
will be exhumed from beneath our honeysoaked legend

what wrinkling sentences  
might be found in the coughing ashwords  
of twisting rootgraves

all vowelless and smoldering

# Instructions for Going Unnoticed

To disappear, become water. From the faucet  
spill out to the sea, and ride in the wake of the whale

'til the ocean is your body and you are the ocean's.  
But if evaporation is what you want, pour yourself

from kettle to cup; be sugar and dissolve. Make  
saccharine your song and sing it softly. To flee

the observing ear, slip through a needle  
and fold quietly into the cabbage rose, unseen

and unsung in a green bed. Be sure to call  
yourself *infant*, meaning *unable to speak*,

and as a way of becoming wallflower, paper  
your body in paisley and love the corner

that loves you back. Go un-photographed  
into the night. Muzzle anything that glows.

---

# Hidden Track

Skip back to the third track. I want to dance again  
so the skater boy with the blue streak in his hair

can see we're all wearing bindis like Gwen Stefani  
& teeny tees from the rummage sale, soaring on the

summer like whooping cranes. When the water  
from the hose hits the night it sizzles & everyone

clinks their beers in time. We're going to drunk  
drive home but stash our booty deep in the trunk

& parallel park real careful. Click the lighter close  
so my face lights up quick, a secret flicker

for a shadow along the side of the house where  
I want to be, pressed against the bricks. When the

joint falls to the humid lawn it's silent & everyone  
awws out the sides of their mouths. We're going

to be big one day. We're going to be huge.

# Built It Into Another

radio the sound of sad cars and the streets  
red with reflected rain—waiting.

Houses bunkered into hills and all weather  
makes is a case for being so-so, another quality

no one but the meteorologists care for.

Me, I'm a dagger.  
Me, I'm the glint  
of heels on the side  
walk. Me, I'm a polish-  
ed can of soda. Me,  
I'm a very blank  
lighthouse.

And the tiny dancing girls reverberate in the water  
tower. They can no longer stretch their long legs. So many  
stored up in there.

A glass overturned for each wild night. Each hair  
tuned up and all their skirts run along

down the piping cackle of the tuning dial  
and whatever falls gets let off alone or left.

Into the barrels we dream and drum.  
Traffic ups its volume.

A curtain of wheel noise, the want for sleep  
behind those wheels churning lie busted threads.



A volley of turn signals caught in return.

Me, I'm a set of under-  
things. Me, I'm the weather  
vain as glory. Me, I'm a cat-  
apult with no arm-  
aments. The force

of a flurry descends onto the scene. All white things  
go blank, even the evening filled with us people.

We are no Sonoran dream. Winter us  
with our bundles of steam-hot laundry

and the only color blue can be jealous of  
as it strips the sky bald with its autumny teeth.

# Another poem

the bruise of building  
    what I would like  
to apologize for

    my whole generation  
photographs mountainsides

whirring mechanistic birds  
run ruin over the waterfalls  
spot lit—us beneath

    say at the feet  
    of the ruin

goodnight trombone  
    & mosquito [playing dead]  
goodnight trackrace for small dogs, world  
cups, faintly lit churches and capitalism

I kiss my fiance's face  
& it feels read  
& she is steeped with light now

think of this thin heat—  
can one line leave messages  
    another records  
        the last of its kind etched in steel  
from leaning  
    & sweat in all its tracks

for these walls pin

(such)

thusness & change

pinking pores thru

the phone hand & night loft

run down & away & a whole body

'of shivers' takes its place

skin cracked & peeling

such that stone cannot match

# August in Iowa

If this were Iowa, if I were in Iowa  
I'd be inside a farmhouse rented  
for \$700 a month and listening to  
an insect cacophony, the nasally  
grinding sound of leg against leg.

I'd be half-sleeping half-waiting  
for you to get home from your  
shift achy and all drenched in  
late summer sweat.

I'd fall asleep to insect legs wake  
to the sound of insects battering  
themselves against the walls  
converging in droves in the  
kitchen crawling all over the  
day-old plates and you'd say  
"how about you do the dishes?"

Standing in a shower flavored  
with sulfur wearing a nose plug  
as the eggy smelling water doused  
us and my hair wouldn't dry all day.

Grilling sweet corn to the sound  
of insect legs drinking college beer  
tossing baseballs to the sound of  
insect legs think eat walk to the  
sound of insect legs in Iowa.

I'd find a cicada nymph shell  
still clinging to a tree trunk—  
the ghost it left behind.

Translated from the Macedonian by Ljubica Arsovska and Peggy Reid

## November in Graz

To survive November in Graz  
when the mirrors in public toilets  
are misted with the breath of political refugees,  
when vacuum cleaners moan  
like dictators in their typists' bedrooms,  
when my bathrobe is a frozen flag on the fortress,  
to survive November in Graz  
with a Cuban family in exile on the floor below,  
to cover your ears and in an attack of powerlessness  
snatch the wastebin from the hands of the woman  
who won't let go while her husband weeps and the child is kicking him,  
and to read Hannah Arendt behind seven doors, hugging the heater.

To survive November in Graz  
when life has gone to some other place,  
sits in the empty amphitheater, rummaging through the thorns,  
while my ancestors' remains are no longer there,  
it's only my brain that's still archaic, my body is of the present;  
we always stain our honor ourselves,  
and our hands are always stained by someone else.  
Bent over the railing at the Schloßberg  
I follow with the probe of my eye three shadows on the floor below,  
and want to be the woman embroidering on a frame in the fortress lift  
on a stool upholstered with the skin of the man she caresses when she's alone,  
and mother of seven daughters she lovingly calls sonnies.

To survive November in Graz  
with the carnivorous plant branching in the bathtub  
when a rainbow appears on the bottom of the pot  
and church bells break the sound barrier of the fortress—

time is a marathon runner, and I'm not in any shape at all,  
bound without wires to the posthumous remains of the city  
I'm asking myself whether life will know how to return,  
to find the way and energetically ring the upper bell,  
to surprise me staring at my Cubans without Cuba in the news  
and reinhabit bones, existence,  
or whether every future November  
in Graz I will have to survive, dead.

## [Excerpt of a Memoir]

Was I then the field, enriched by river water, producing a nourishment, the certain nourishment of grass?

Or the stone foundation of a house near the ocean in which a family? (Girls clamber on rocks, sneaker soles cling for a vertical crawl.) Or was I the yarn hung to dry, dripping bloody dye to the floor below? The passivity of clay kept moist in a bag, set in a corner of a basement room—was that it?

Was the blinking light on a building top, a blue flash to warn birds and planes, or was I those planes? (A memorial in how the curtain hangs, in the folds of its ability to conceal.) Was water with a film of dust on top, or that pool where the frog sat breathing, breathing through a bubble?

Was “sick of my face.” Said my mother, ruefully, a slight roll of her eyes, “don’t worry. It’ll change.” Was cold at the wrists. Two boys were lost in the woods. And one, we knew, would not survive.

Was that it, then—the dark theater in which I heard my father breathing, the suicide father blowing himself up before us, his car exploding into yellow light? A sister and a brother walk toward that mirage. That mirage of water and tree, was that me? Was watching her swim, the little lift of her chin, the blue of her suit blurred by the pool. Was unsure what that fire meant, my father beside me. Two boys play piano, one first, then the other—and one, we know, will not survive. And was I that piano in that monastery, or the other one, in the grandmother’s house, where a girl sits improvising, the chilly smell of pine?



Was waiting on carpets and couches—was that it—for the musculature of adulthood, the muscular pattern of an adult day. Women slice fruit. Was “sick of my” car rides and corners of grey. The city smells of its river.

Don't try so hard, said someone taking my picture in a tree. Was pouring sugar onto butter with a lump in my throat. Was measuring that walk, that walk from the burning car, that walk through the woods into fields.

Was I, then, that burning thing?

## [Girl]

In October of 1973 a rough rug and a wooden wheel. In April of 1988 the telephone fixed to the wall. A barrier is constructed between the voice of the man and my ear. Such that his face becomes aesthetic or perhaps prosthetic. Laundromats are erotic and so I frequent them alone. Plastic seats take on the same meaning as the foam at lakeshore. In over half of all cases, a rogue girl will widen the avenue by walking it. In perilous tinny journeys she fails to locate her room. A bare cheek sutured by the cold and some meat on the stair. Now her mouth's intricate movement accuses us of the cowardice we all share.

# [Architecture]

*for LF*

Now is the cold dirt directed, now the sugar poured from the bag. My father is a painter and he plays a lot of tennis. Is a military man who very rarely laughs.

Now is the sun counting the rooftops, and all the Julies all in a line. Now, the last breath taken, turning the corner like a kid on a bike. Next, the sensation of waiting for a word, a word splayed across the face of the writer, cheek struck by such a bland light.

My father is a card player and a very good cook, a doorman in need of a shave. And now the barrier of attempting to speak, to speak to our sons with their tears on, tears on their shirts just like birds on the wire, though there are no birds, no wire.

And now nothing's growing from the car park, for glass gives it up now, its resistance to that light. Glass effacing itself, effacing itself like my father the photographer, befriending time with his fingertips at the pause.

My father is a mountain climber, a park ranger, a philanthropist donating his body to the grass, his mind to the task of designing his couch, for my father is an architect. And now is the daughter under her hat, schooled in the sneer, dancing her erasure-dance in which her feet free the dirt of its design, hands abolish all lines, all arrows from the air.

# The Dynamics of Do-It-Yourself Porn

I'm watching, rewatching,  
someone else's sex on X-tube. Three guys, in a shitty room:

cheap paneling, bare mattress, torn curtains,  
bottles of lube, Dr. Pepper, and Jungle Juice on a table.

They're doing it on the floor. I don't fast forward,  
it all plays out. I'm not into it

to get turned on, to get off. I'm watching  
this guy, off to the side,

while the other two screw.  
The unfucked guy I'm calling Todd,

because he looks like this Todd I knew. No one  
talks, but the top

keeps spanking the bottom. Hard. And Todd  
touches the top's back, the bottom's belly, he's trying

to get a little attention, feel  
a little flesh, a little heat, a little something

that is not his own  
need. There's another in the room,

manning the camera. He zooms in on Todd.  
His face. His dilated eyes, flared nostrils,

---

his deep hesitant breaths. He's a beacon  
of need. He's watching. A yearn

and strain equal to theirs. They don't stop  
his hands, but they don't touch him. No one

says a word. There's another  
close-up on Todd,

and what's Todd thinking?

Besides: *I want someone to touch  
me.* Sometimes that's all we can think.

And sometimes we're glad for anything

another man will let us have.

I've left my rooms, my bed, driven

poor streets past factories and tipples, searching  
for an address in some strange town. Porch lights

have gone off as I've hit the last step. Doors  
shut in my face.

Sometimes they never opened in the first place.  
The camera's back on Todd.

Two weeks ago I met a guy  
from Craigslist. All I remember is the hall

to his apartment. Stuccoed walls  
crawling with honeybees. Dozens.

Each a potential threat. Each  
the size of a capsule. Bad enough I've watched this

video more than once. I can't help myself.  
I need to see

that look on someone else.  
What do I look like, when I look

like that? I've looked into Brian's flushed face:  
it scared me. I wanted to stop.

Instead? I bit his shoulder.  
I can't remember the Craigslist guy.

But I remember the coming from,  
the going to his apartment. The jittery

fluorescents, stained carpet, the bees.  
Those bees: they scale the wall, daubing

Their tails across the plaster.  
Haphazard, traipsing.

---

# Bangers and Mash

Will there be enough

brunch for everyone

in Brooklyn

eggs to crack and poach

hash browns bacon

toasted rye

and stories of pickups

clandestine canoodles

impromptu exits

at the costume party

she brought home a guy

dressed as a  
skeleton

he came over

they shot the shit

they boned

the next day fled

she wrapped his clothing

in a bag

what did you do

last night

who did you

how many weekends

of doing laundry

by oneself

evenings washing dishes

a chuckle on the couch

before giving up

every day begins

and ends

in bed



---

## *from* The Pain We Do Inflict

I am assembling bricks in my sleep—a voice tracing my spine. Dreams buried under my neck. In my dreams, you are my cracks. In my dreams, I am inside of yours and I know how deep they go.

Skin from my left knee is smeared somewhere where we were, deep into the salt. I remember bits of sound: a car horn, tires on asphalt, laughter, a lighter being lit, the inhalation of smoke, the buzzing of a fluorescent lamp, gravel under boots, the zip of a coat, cotton from my jeans speckled into the gravel.

I took many long walks to nowhere this winter. The snow crept over the tips of my boots and I watched you slip through the snow, always wearing the wrong shoes, always slipping. I trailed behind, laughing. The bricks are baked with our footsteps, pressed with the lint from our wool and the ash from cigarettes. Always the smoking under heat lamps.

It is so simple: *I want my skin smeared into the salt. I want it to harden at the base of the bricks.*

# Topieceward

i'm throwing out useless lemon drops

broken doors stacked in doorways  
on doorways

our time together: molecular & languid  
molecular & languid  
molecular & languid

we arrange now: a nonend

overflow water platform  
the not knowing the no

part of a part  
your same  
your sane

end the noise

chamomile rain

a large house      to run from  
at & onto

my respiration

blocked & beveled  
& destitute

this is the final anthology, *girl—it's nothing*

# Orangutang/Redhead

*“But I lie still, strengthless and smiling under a maenad rule.”*

—John Berryman, *Sonnets to Chris*

If men lie strengthless under maenad,  
then I lie digested under tiger.  
Ra-Ra-Royal. I can't count cat-spots  
cringing & when at school they called you ranga.  
I'm sorry but your spots collect in pairs  
& sometimes sleepy I see you buzzing  
auburn: not fire, not ranga. No. A little  
idolatry & my own hair curling  
heavy, but I have laid backwards to gold  
tigers not taunted redheads. There's more  
refracted tropic seas & I see you distant, there  
your red light shifting, collecting power in  
space. These cat-spots, settling shadowed worlds on  
your skin, & in your hair, iron-rich rifts in time.

# Some Pricks I've Known

*for la Rosa*

What in the double helix has coiled  
this spring in my mattress, parted  
my parentheses and packed them  
with bruises and kisses, a confetti  
of lips and hips, a few seconds of passion  
like swift kicks to the small intestine?  
What in the worm turned dirt,  
the dark dreams of the dead,  
made me agree to this arrangement?  
(Once I had a heart that beat like  
a boxing glove; once I had some  
smarts, but they were decimated  
to cells in circular, and now  
I am no more than a piece of planet,  
of clock, of thoughtful head).  
I'd rather be tossed at a casket,  
sold at the gas station,  
tattooed above the tits of a stripper.  
Anything would be better than  
fading here, waiting for someone  
to pick me.

# Egomania

I'm in someone else's fever dream.  
I'm culling Americana.  
I'm bleeding residuum in hunks of earwax.  
I'm trying to make sense of approaching shapes.  
I'm keeping my legs crossed.  
I'm letting my tongue run against the roof of my mouth.  
I'm watching the blood in my veins in braintime.  
I'm counting the calories of each breath.  
I'm trying to create a romantic fugue state  
    with pan-seared scallops & Wagyu beef  
    finished with a béarnaise.  
I'm worrying if I'm being ironic enough.  
I'm making each piece of artifice.  
I'm stitching a quilt by hand without batting.  
I'm revising everything in my head before I write it.  
I'm writing everything in my head before I write it.

## *from* Match

Was it but a dream?

I think my marriage  
was: I trailed dogs

up avenues fraught  
for the red hydrants.

What a happy bunch  
I thought, leashes taut.

What lucky bastards.

A transition, of course.

Settled like blue ink  
into black: why

black? Sun & glass  
in July, because oceans

wash oil to the shore.

These contracts or  
celebrations, then

a settlement settled  
down.

When I forget  
to clear the woods,  
guess I'm damned

& fool for this faith  
beyond lust or fame,  
of kneeling readily.

Cloven like currency.



It's bearable lightness  
*please.*

Eye & touch  
& rabbits in a garden.

Snakes have no name,  
neither does grass

nor feet, traffic pining  
tired hours for love.

Days without a comb,  
feathers on plastic birds.

One of me sleeps  
in tubs.

One of me  
is a brand of privacy.

*Hear me, Tuscaloosa.*

A drunk, a liability.

One of me is guilty  
of burning homes.

*O hear me in Syracuse.*

i say i am spartina. it is lost  
on you.

be the salt water or the fresh water.

it doesn't matter to me if you want  
to say we are brackish.

you can't understand.  
i think ghost crabs would be your favorite.

you want to know how barnacles fuck.  
you have been in egret against the marsh.

i have lain under you like silt under the edisto.  
it is dark, and i miss you more.

when i say *fiddler*, you hear *feather*.  
and i want, for you, there to be such a thing  
as feather crabs. blue and ghost.

when the tide comes up,  
we can hear the barnacles  
opening with a pop.

you say *there must be snakes around here*  
and i say *i don't know*,  
*but let's go find a dock to lie on somewhere:*

*bare our skin, still shy with each other,*  
*but we can pull it away, off our pale bones,*  
*and go swimming.*

# O Thank You, Country Blues

Like a giant waffle cone  
with two scoops  
my big-legged mama  
bent over  
to fetch a pie from the oven.  
Then up  
and turning around,  
came at me:  
straight for four steps,  
stumbling for two,  
straight for two more,  
nearly falling  
for another, stumbling  
on the next, and straight again  
for two more steps.  
And so we stand face to face.  
Her 12-step approach  
reverberates in the wet steam  
rising from the pie  
she holds between us.  
With the deep-rooted meat of her presence  
from which her swollen,  
gritty eyes peer  
I am relieved  
of all my impotencies.

---

# My Americana

some lucky boys are born with reservoirs of violence. i only know how to sing and when to run. the stag refused to die for a long time after being shot. too big and too wild. too much breath in it. in the eyes i see Dustin, who i did not see that night, pouring red into the t-shirt of a shirtless dark-skinned girl—in her lap—mickey dees parking lot—which is how i heard it ended. i stand over it. i want to walk away and start a war. deer runs for its whole life—the instinct to hide showing in chandelier antlers. prostrate in the morning now, he goes violently by not going. nostrils blowing dust. eyes burning out. public and unafraid.

## Family *vii*

They were swimming together, my mother and uncle, and when they lifted their heads from the water I saw the faces of my great-grandchildren. They swam for a long time in the music. First I was their father, then I was their daughter. My father's eyes, like my sister's, are blue, angry. My father and sister sleep together at night with their clothes on under a thick down blanket. From one end to the other an ocean of rage forever fills their cups. They dream mostly in unison so that if my father throws a ball in his dream, my sister catches it in hers. We occupy the same house, but the living room holds a different time of day—often a different year. My grandfather and I are talking there on the carpet, holding some game pieces. He gives me \$80 to save for later and I tell him *It's a shame but I don't need money anymore*. The two girls on a swing in our hearts hold hands and one of their palms sweats because she knows she loves the other—she has always loved the other. Once in a while night arrives and it is the same night everywhere in the house—we can all four look out separate windows and the same bolt of lightning will appear, scowling amicably. When we pair off, it is always one-two-two-one or one-one-two-one. My sister mostly with herself, and me on one end of the house and everyone else on the other, wandering the staircases with the lights turned off. I never had a brother, but my mother did and my sister did and eventually he took over the house. *Twilight goes here*, he said, pointing to the locked attic. *Twilight and my father praying face to face, cloistered by the exposed insulation*. Twilight here, midnight there in the trees out the window seen from my sister's room—not in the cold leaves themselves flowing above the backyard, but in the view of their shadows undulating as the crickets pray. Only one room where morning resides, where we can see each other in the present moment—decades of near misses totaling up in this heavy space ever approaching upshot. In that room my grandfather wakes from his swing and I say, *Where were you? Thank God, I do need money this time around*. Everyone sits across from each other, drinking milk as sunlight illuminates the dust motes in the air, careful for our feet not to touch below the table.

## Family *viii*

*It's your birthday today* everyone says to each other, then looks around perplexed.—*We don't really have birthdays.—That's like saying this table comes from trees.—The table does come from trees.—I thought we crawled out from under a rock.* Finally, my sister to my mother—*You look like a bitch in the daylight.* The breakfast room windows give way to a wide lawn filled with egg-shaped pools. Birds of paradise fall at intervals into the water soaked with grass blades. *The best were those underwater tea parties we used to have before we could decide who was who* my sister says. *Remember how we'd switch all the rules? I'd be the dad and say 'Pass the margarine and apricot jam' and three people would start passing plates. I liked floating there with our legs curled below us. It felt as if we'd never need air again.* Calm settles over the table like a watermelon in a still-life.—*Melons don't exactly grow on trees.—Well they don't grow on tables either.—Has it ever occurred to you that the sycamores at the end of the lawn look like us? You could pick out individual specimens and each would correspond to a member of the family. The one on the edge with scruffy foliage, the trunk in the middle tall as a wise man, the stump out front leaning into its own branches as if they were elbows.—You bastard* my sister interjects. No one responds till my father jumps in—*It's almost as if those trees stand for us somehow.* Something about the way the sky appears behind the leaves occurs to everyone simultaneously, like a popped grape. Was the sky that shade yesterday? Then my mother to my sister—*I liked our tea parties too.* We reach across the table one at a time but quickly retract. *Pass the—? Could you please—? Did you—?* Soon, as if we'd never shared a meal before, no one remembers what it was they'd wanted passed.

# *Novum*

The place where the water turns into the shore  
distinguishes this setting from the actual world.

Every morning, the sky storms down like  
glow-in-the-dark stars from a suburban childhood.

When you've got nothing left to lose, you might  
spend hours staying up until you fall asleep

from chlorofluorocarbon fumes. Your soaked  
cotton dress & the sweaty leaves suggest

sex, but this is an island of one. The under-  
story: a collection of documents w/questionable

relevance, unless it's about the othering  
distance. Meaning the night has a seeming

quality. Or rather a seamless transition  
to morning: it's never not white-noisy.

The self comes to mind: a tabula rasa?  
No, an erasure.



---

# Chelsea/Suicide

*for Joe*

In every myth there's a secret. Like the time I was looking for my childhood around the next bend after Newark and missed it, or the time teeth were discovered in my favorite uncle's yard and he disclaimed ownership and sang falsettos.

I went to a meeting on 28th Street. The guy next to me had eyes exactly like yours, corpuscles hardening inside blue irises. He stood too close when he told me I would die if I didn't ease up on myself. I thought he was right but I wanted him to step back so I didn't have to see inside his liver, which was sodden, like mine, and dark with tinges of red, white, and rosé.

He talked to himself in the middle of the room, the way he would talk to anyone who used hyperbole. He said: *I tried suicide but it didn't work*. When he stuck out his hand I shook it.

I walked with him down 8th and we parted at 21st. I thought of all the times I'd dozed in my car near the river, how cops would come to my window and tap, telling me it wasn't safe for a woman alone in the middle of the day in a car near the river in a world like this one. I'm sober, I'd say, pointlessly.

Now there's snow in Chelsea and my soul leaps in something I've heard described as bliss. You're never far, I realize, and here is the secret: If you'd lived you'd be asleep now beside me, bent around me like an aura, keeping me safer than I ever thought I had the right to be.

# what we know about wilderness

we are looking for the finest  
flannels / for fall  
colors in more unexpected places  
but we know dark know cabin  
dark know moonless

we are searching for waterproof  
boots / for sure-footed standing  
water in our parallel pawprints  
trails of rows of concentric circles  
in puddles where all the bugs land

we need to find the rocky dirt  
roads / they're winding  
the watches that don't need to be wound  
what is the time where you are  
what should we make the time be

---

# notes on blackhawk island

\*

fungus rushing under the bark  
of old root  
where dead wood  
softens and frays

\*

*to be counted on: new leaves*  
*new dead leaves*  
and how they curl  
into each other

\*

how this river looks  
like a river I've seen  
before  
the Menominee  
wide and muddy

\*

tree uprooted  
dead tree  
what was once  
so deep in soil bent  
back now  
roots splayed:  
a frame

\*

found a feather

kept it

left the trash

candy wrapper/bottle

beer can/shoe/some tires

\*

stepped on a frog

actually sat

on lots of living things

\*

anyone know anything

about mushrooms

Carl

don't eat that

\*

if they thought I wasn't

going to fill my pockets with rocks

well

\*

*you are my other country*

*and I find it hard going*

you are my rivers I don't recognize

\*

ramshackle dock rendered  
unstable—  
the planes of the planks  
all wrong

\*

and I am floating  
so fast

# jackalope

living only

in the Southwest states  
where the leaves of the yucca  
weren't the only things  
exploding in wide patches  
the nuclear stretches  
1950s Nevada desert

the jackalope bounds

through the mesa  
jackrabbit body  
antlers sprouting like branches  
paws stained with  
orange sand that it  
licks off each toe

an American mix-up

like no other  
it only breeds in freak  
electrical storms  
the lightning  
a flash of a mating call  
specific only to this rare species

capturing a jackalope

is no easy task  
but these critters  
love to lap up  
Tennessee whiskey  
until they stagger

into cacti

needles catching the antlers

getting themselves into a mess

they're just too drunk

to get themselves out of

# Community Pool

The summer hair started  
growing *there*, I watched

the twins sitting at the edge  
of the deep end. Their red

trunks dangled just  
above the water. How

I wished I could swim—  
to move closer, to smell

the chlorine.



# The Pasta Cooks While

A city is approaching                    just  
one    street                    over.

In the next room, my daughter is busy  
growing.

Two years old:                    “I’ll be right back  
I have to go to college.”

A window            closes  
a wound.

In the reflection                    the Tulips  
are flat            without  
water.

Someday I will tell    my  
daughter                    I tried  
for her.

I’ve never been  
this            grounded.

The noodles rise  
and                    separate.

# Youth Anthem

someone's spray-painted  
black flag's logo on every square from second  
all the way to the madison.

we can hear the drone and grind from inside.  
we're early and already there's a flock of black and boots  
waiting at the doors.

people drag on about their parents and what it means to hate your home.

i know it's cool to hate where i came from,  
but i love my parents. and when i chime in,  
it's all bullshit.

i just want to be part of something that contracts at the middle when the tempo kicks up.

can you feel that pushing against your chest?

there's something magnetic pulsing.  
it's not the ball-game or frampton at the arena—

kids keep coming around corners, starving for that thud.

the local bands are already inside. someone  
says they've already sound-checked and everyone's envy summits.

we talk about the band we're in or the bands  
we'll start and what they'll be doing in a month.  
but it's all motions and mouth.

i don't want to be on that stage.  
i don't belong behind a guitar.  
i belong in the churn with everyone else.

there are kids handing out flyers,  
talking about rebellion. that hum, like street-lights and electrical wires.

if you ask anyone,  
they'd say, we feel like giants gathered here,  
even if tonight we only watch—

# The Unreported Incident At the Downtown Seattle Police Station

ask anyone who went to the madison.

this story is legend, it bumped  
around the inside till everyone knew.

it's not raining and there's no purple-orange  
haze smearing across the crooked teeth of the skyline.

i want this to be cinematic.

i want to put noir-lighting over the van  
where the kids are masked and dressed in black.

i want to paint pitch around everywhere  
except the light at the station entrance and the one over the van.

i've been trading stories with dave for months—

there's the *one* when all those punks showed up on snl to watch fear.  
the chaos, the holes in the greenroom walls, the piano strings yanked  
from inside, belushi high as fuck slam-dancing with all the punks,  
the crowd unwilling, becoming a part of the churn. i tell him about  
the one at the police station.

only *this* story hasn't been recorded:  
its evidence comes during the pre-show  
gather or between songs,  
when someone's strings break.

dave keeps sending me records he thinks i haven't heard.

this wasn't cinematic.  
it was shorts weather and there were lights  
saturating the street, parking lot, and entrance.  
30 minutes after shift change—  
all those police cars were parked and emptied.

quiet.

the highway bruising silence.

i want to stretch a metaphor across the page.  
i can't quite *get there*—  
the moments right before those punks jump out of the van  
with their gasoline, matches, and chains.

after the last raid, two kids died in the same  
ambulance and all the cops had to say to each other:

*these fucking junkies asked for it.*

but they weren't junkies.

most of them had split from that punk-lifestyle,

and while not everyone was edge,

everyone was clean or on their way.

so many kids already had drug charges.

*it wasn't ideal, there were bad folks everywhere, dave says. have you listened  
to SOA or what?*

i don't want to make heroes out of them,

but this is the part where they fight back.

every story that gets rambled

bloats different details, so i want the facts.

dave's never heard the one about the police station.

this never made it to the papers,

even though they set a fire on the front steps of the station,

chained the doors, and drove off.

all anyone heard was the burning of a fire,  
the chains rattling, and the squeal of van  
wheels up the block.

i want that kind of movement,  
where the fiction takes over, but it's not in this story.

# To the Heart of It

the days of the moon  
signal how much  
she's paying attention.  
clearly not much or  
she'd come closer.  
clearly we're boring  
but not well  
because those are craters  
not tunnels.



---

# Tactics Ring Through Needles in Rain

The city fills its fountains with cement.  
Hot arguments preceding auroras. No fines  
For littering, loitering near the steel gates  
Closing off the grounds. Shouts fill  
Observatories. The trees are painted  
A terrible green. Strange mothers wrap stones  
In gold, marked fragile. We touch beads  
Of perfume to wrists on arms in the grass.  
There and then, the year is gone. The marshals  
Grow impatient beneath the Italian cypresses  
Emerging variously from the white architecture.  
When the boundaries fail, a loss begins  
Alarms cannot dispel, and we are no longer  
Innocent, nor lovingly enough together.

# If You Ever Finally Decide to Set the House Ablaze

I'll wait up the block in the flickering storm, the plush black felt beginning to pick up and barrel across the road. Now

set the traps because tossing out that watch is so alluring, it's always ticking off our time left conjoined, in thought and otherwise, in we plunge

with our yoyos and tassels, tethered despite indefinite cosmos; we must premeditate & fantasize our re-entry:

the end of our race, collapse into each other with overdue and anxious perfection, achieved in

brief moments we will absolutely over-romance to ourselves, alone in parking lots and shower stalls, unable to pry our

eyes away from what is fleeting. I'm not afraid of your jail time, take me hungry and poor,

I'm willing to shoot—  
I'd break your arm with my addicted concentration,

I've been breaking these rocks for years,  
I'm having another dream of you in my veins.

Cheaper and harder than mercenaries  
in a dope forest you never pass

out, never pass out  
on you my vision narrows,

not too much longer can I run  
your ageless mile, raspberries cover my body

because I do all my own stunts,  
mad at the heat and the utility company,

don't lose your selfishness or your gun dealer,  
a whiz in the clasping heat.

# Glove Bone

Instead, I will be gentle and firm,  
cradle your dampening back, your hips,  
explore with a vigilance for the supple fresco.  
Massaging with careful fingers upward  
from the hips, always work bottom to top,  
excavate the ball-and-socket joint—  
folding back in quick sequential jerks,  
it pops, cartilage severed, it all falls away now:  
oyster from hip, leg from torso, wing, carcass.

---

## *from* Decade Zero

A decade of zeroes  
and they never gave it a name.  
They swiveled their necks back  
toward the 90s, shot reverse shot,  
and sometimes that meant more  
than a century ago,  
flower in buttonhole  
and so many stars seeable,  
some of them already dead.  
We ought ought *ought* to look  
forward, they allowed,  
barrette-snapping  
carnations into green hair.  
They grew gangly, sullen, and wise  
packing their lunchboxes for the future.

---

Within ten years, all their favorite bands  
came out of hiding, reuniting onstage  
in flannel and glistening hermit skin.  
Anthems that'd known all the living rooms  
in all the college towns  
they'd ever broken a lease in  
sounded watery, tinny out of doors.  
They held cans on strings up to the glory days  
that would never text them back.

---

They were trying to remember  
what a hero was like  
and they remembered Ethan Hawke  
from *Reality Bites*. They remembered  
someone lazy, principled, pinko,  
last of the postwar damned-if-I-do's.  
Now our heroes have to care  
even *less* than that!—they decided.  
What's required is a self-reflexive leap  
past irony toward near-divine alienation.  
Also, they noted, thinking of other  
dramedies with great soundtracks,  
better if the hero is a girl, and better  
if the word doesn't sound like a drug.

---

At the Y2K party we shouted  
*Two! One! Zero! Zero! Zero!*  
but time went on  
we trudged home  
laid our oversize 2000 glasses  
by the bedside  
when disaster arrived after all  
(one two one two)  
(and through and through)  
we stayed in our time zones  
except those who passed out of time

orange with alertness  
we stared at the red, boxy faces  
of digital clocks  
carrying few liquids with us  
into the future

---

Food slowed down or grew whole  
stayed raw and we never ever  
meant to slurp the ice off Kilimanjaro  
it's just that we didn't know any farmers  
even though some of us were from a place  
for which the imagination suggested cows  
We were broke for years without  
a supermarket to walk to  
on the stardust trail  
LA, Chicago, New York  
we hardly knew ye  
though you took all our money  
and grinned with your skyline  
teeth against the mountains  
rising from the frozen lake  
gap-toothed you offered  
us your plenty is never enough

# If She Remembers

She took too much chili cheese dip. And my Girl Scout friend  
Katie Johnson, with a too thick, bland brown bob, told me  
to tell her  
that she was taking too much.

I felt hot and stared at the Mill Street Mustangs  
wood paneled stage.  
Looked sideways along the potluck table that ended  
in the wall.  
My cheeks were heavy with blood.  
*Save some dip for the rest*

I didn't call her fat, but I know that's what I meant.  
You should've seen her,  
maybe seven. In her favorite outfit.  
Gray and maroon raglan  
a star graphic centered  
and matching gray pants.  
Hemline dragging on the floor.



---

# The Vital System

I, in strutting cock stance,  
anatomy blazing, phonic, self-  
made mid-light. Aperture  
active in the jaw, in cambers of  
maw guarding the vagina's  
axis. Light vying to tincture  
body systems rumored only  
*red*. Man's bleak reverie ~ the  
female constrained in port,  
magma, ocher-washed  
causeways. The late prism  
of the metamorphic world; I  
trans-formed: across canvas  
stretched white, a black bone  
bi-continental collage, a put-  
upon pace. Belligerent  
incubator steaming the New  
World's afterbirth. But alive.  
But a beginning spectrum.

II.

Jumpseed tangles in orchid's  
inflamed globe, frames a scene.  
Inches inside, *verde*, ardor;  
green atop green vertigo  
prairie, tendered crevasse.  
Yet. Undergrowth. Her bastion  
evidences fable: *he plants his  
rollicking root*. Blood lets, not  
enough to regret, repent. A  
body politic ravel. He hastens  
her tinning. Inches outside,  
series of labels lie like dress.  
This female; chartered, doe-  
still dream.

III.

Labial. Women grapple-hook  
women. Plum loaf, garnet welt,  
milk smear; complexion an  
arousal-lidded cunt. Mode:  
additive. Rectum tension; seg-  
regated jetty. *Please* stutters.  
Carve the runnel. Diagram  
bellow. What angle? Sap.  
Cradle. Ruin. Hierodule on  
knee-tip; American worship  
origin. Cuspside of mouths'  
vivid chroma. Posy-fed, leaking  
beetle. *Lymph*, weeps Cervix.

# A Young Girl and a Hooded Attendant

You must have in your muscles your threshold of pain.  
Said, when the light, hole or gracious hand appeared, Yes.  
First looked behind you to the macramé of tubers, rigs  
and your body's openings, that were *made* openings,  
through which slender metal mouths sucked or spewed,  
all the black-black, the sterilized tears, the life and life-  
lessness of that place.

Must have looked on all it amounted, surveyed the  
wilt, rot, measurable ravage, and looked away. What  
intelligent sickness.

Rather—what is in front of you answers how the water  
and the wood bridge leading to the water signify a freedom  
only felt when going under: *Count backward from 100.*

100, 99, 98 . . . It doesn't take what you think it takes  
to leave the body. What it requires is that you admit  
yourself, the bleak shelter of your body against  
the calm . . . 92, 91, of what impresses your optic nerve:  
Yourself, woundless. And saturating *that* desire  
further corrected colors.

---

# For One Whose Love Has Gone

There was a crack  
in ecstasy; it split the oak  
with flameless fire.  
A raptor left good bones  
in the divided tree (the spine?  
of a mouse?) & then flew off  
for a muffled sanctuary . . .

Some say *get*  
*over it*, but there you are,  
surrounding it. Slant sun  
shines in. Bring it along,  
bone-reader, bring the banquet—

# Black Apricots

Stood up for dinner by his bisexual lover, Peter Finch  
listens aching to *Così fan tutte* in *Sunday Bloody Sunday*—

he shares the young man knowingly with Glenda Jackson.  
It's complicated. Until it isn't.

What it feels like to sit slumped in the dusk  
of an uptown theatre one long Sunday afternoon

watching the humble feast in *The Tree of Wooden Clogs*,  
your short life washing over you in silver waves—  
then you dream:

a young Doris Day snares the plum role in a Wong Kar-wai film  
and is made cool love to by Tony Leung Chiu-wai;

afterward she tenderly feeds him tiny black apricots balanced  
on mother-of-pearl chopsticks;

you know this isn't real, but you want to close your eyes  
let the music take you—  
awaken to the familiarity of strange fruit.

# Love, and Honor, and Pity, and Pride, and Self-deprecating Verbal Sparring:

Checking to see if our neighbors care for your safety,  
we open the windows. Every few minutes, we put  
our faces close to the breathable screens and yell out  
what we think will gain attention: *I have a knife! You  
are a pussy! I sleep with your uncles because you don't  
satisfy me!* Etcetera. It's your idea to soak a piece of  
plywood in the bathtub overnight and hit it with the palms  
of our hands so it sounds like someone is being  
rushinglly slapped in the neck. Each time we use it, I can  
tell it turns you on and at one point, after you scream *you  
son of a bitch, I hope you kill me so they put you in jail after a long  
drawn-out celebrity trial and you spend the rest of your life giving cups of  
your urine to a cellmate who has a fetish for horses and makes you  
whinny while he rubs your back*, I think you might even ask me  
to hold you. But you don't. We spend the rest of the afternoon

breaking dishes and tearing up photocopies of our marriage contract, and when the cops don't come and we're pretty sure no one is still awake, we turn on the Golf Channel and shut the windows. Cleaning up the next morning, I find a piece of your cuticle and a note on the table asking me to make sure I have no visible bruises. In a bag by the door is a rope and two Ziploc freezer bags. When I see it, I run around the house screaming *North Dakota, North Dakota, North Dakota.*



# Misspent Gender Sonnet:

It sounded like a parade. Like twenty-  
seven badly played brass instruments and a middle  
aged white woman waving from the back  
of a refurbished convertible, but it wasn't  
a parade. It was constructed  
malfeasance. A missing guardrail, a risen  
lake, a felled night left  
hacking its way through the steel  
sheet of a city, a relay team of high school  
cheerleaders meeting  
at a bridal shop in an attempt to see  
what happens when a person gives  
up. You heard it first but I  
tried to assure you that  
the activity was being overseen by the appropriate

officials and that in the morning we would read  
how lucky we are to live with all this culture. You climbed  
back into bed and talked about your shoulder. How you dislocated it  
often during sex because you liked the sharp pain and what it did  
for your memory. I fell asleep but sometime near dawn  
I heard you singing a song about ambulances and cliffs and  
a man pushing a grocery cart full of tin cans past an empty stretcher  
that was waiting for a helicopter to drop another wet  
body recovered while dredging the water. Your tone was  
soft and you sounded like a male newscaster. *There are no doctors* you sang  
in your teddy. *There are no doctors and this wasn't*  
*an accident.*

---

# Not in Me as Much as On

Six lines worn with black bumps, feces, and blood,  
tattooed with trundling scarves and turpentine pants,  
worn with melancholy, expectation, crows.  
Sewn on the jacket of every new thumb-bump, every new  
palm-pimple, every new mouth-sore.  
Worn with ill-advised admission and candor,  
never hiding, never covering, smiling.  
Worn close, worn worn like gloves, with physical contact.  
Friction, rubbing, stroking—always in the mouth,  
passing through—never coming in.  
*It just doesn't happen that way.*  
Forcing through exits and hurting, always in blood,  
unless killed, in which case always still  
in salt.

# Love Letter 54

## *First Beings*

red mud glob  
 a wish caught  
 by ancient  
 loneliness  
 which is mostly  
 loving too much  
 and puckering  
 holy antimatter  
 until noticed  
 we beg the dark  
 grazing  
 the prayers  
 helium swaddled  
*Shekhinah*  
 receiving touch  
 intuitions  
 the beast herd  
 on a shell of ice  
 they will run

wiped into lines  
 between my teeth  
 distances, touch  
 caused by knowing  
 charisma in looking  
 yet not enough  
 in the swimmable iris  
 shielded from death  
 by its formless edges  
 to put us out  
 sweetly the dead flower  
 we remember in bits  
 and we lift our faces  
 light crowding  
 in gradations of light  
 tongue-swept  
 remembering  
 that burst  
 leaves orange

and stars exhaled above  
 escaped and came to life  
 of its own nature  
 what I'm capable of  
 giving you my hands  
 to keep from growing old  
 where we're nose to nose  
 in a great big cloud  
 halting and turning in  
 with each other's thumbs  
 our lips  
 make us children  
 to the beloved  
 at the bower  
 the bread of you  
 rhythms of magma  
 swirling to skids  
 like a billion cocoons  
 in November.

---

# The Problem with Straight People (What We Say Behind Your Back)

Max after the art opening:

*Sometimes I hate straight people so much  
I want to kill them. That's why  
I don't write. I can't say that in a book  
and that's all I want to say.*

Brandon on the phone:

*We should start straight bashing.  
Find an asshole straight guy  
and beat him with a bat,  
fuck him in the ass.*

*Gang up on straight couples  
kissing on the train.  
Tell them to take  
their disgusting lifestyle somewhere else.*

*I know it's not right, but I'm tired  
of making everyone comfortable.  
Do you know how many times  
I've been called faggot in New York?*

Celeste yesterday:

*Fuck straight women who don't think  
what we do is fuck,  
and fuck straight women who don't ask  
about my lover!*

Sara's e-mail:

*I just want to hold Michele's hand  
without straight men yelling out the car window.  
Can one thing in the world  
have nothing to do with them?  
I'd like to rip their balls off!*

Michele's email:

*I want to scream at my co-workers:  
"Yes, we're lesbians! No, we don't want to have a baby!"*

Tim at G-Lounge:

*I hate straight girls in gay bars,  
thinking they can be as rude as they want  
because nobody here wants to sleep with them,  
like our world's not real to them,  
like we're not real!*

Steven at lunch:

*Straight people will only go so far,  
and then they'll turn on you.  
There's always some line, some point  
where you're on your own.  
You'll be too gay, too prissy,  
too loud, too something.*

Me right now:

*I hate straight students who look disgusted once they figure out I'm gay.*

*I hate straight men who imitate my voice when they think I can't hear them.*

*I hate straight men who make their wrists limp when they think I can't see them.*

*I hate straight men who joke about bending over for soap in the shower.*

*I hate straight men who have sex with men.*

*I hate straight women who say, "It's such a waste that you're gay."*

*I hate straight people who say, "I don't understand why you're so angry."*

# Prodigal

This morning I yelled at a student for texting in class.

*Put that away, I don't want to see it.*

I wanted to scream: *Get fucked.*

I wanted to humiliate her, make her feel how I feel:

*There's the faggot professor.* They don't say it like that, but I feel the looks, the not-quite-whispered whispers, the disgust of what I do with men

cracked across their faces. I want to say:

*It's all true. There's nowhere I won't put a cock, and I see a lot of me in you.*

Am I really back in West Virginia?

Did I really leave New York City?

It's hard to remember,

here where everything is green.

*I was afraid I'd get AIDS from the toilet seat,*

I heard a girl say on the street my first day in town.

And in the store with the confederate flags

I interrupted a joke: *How many fags,* big laugh,

*Oh, can I help you?*

A person who lives in the same state

as his parents, one of three gay men in a tiny college town,

someone who thinks he's always dying:

so many things I never wanted to be again.

*It doesn't work like that,* I tell the students.

*It's not A to B to C. It's over and over and all at once.*

But it's hard to see that

past all these trees, fucking trees.



---

# driving to Memphis in a storm

eating a pomegranate  
over your lap

your favorite jeans  
bleached by delta sun

I took them off once

you had the neck  
of a mallard

looking back at the bullet

in a pick-up

drive

till hail cracks through your windshield

I love you like this

the soft mouth  
of a golden retriever

carrying the body back

# Path

What if a matter of speaking comes up for us?

In which we lunge for it, take notes on where all the suggestions have been coming from & send them to ourselves a year later.

What is taking you so long & why aren't you in a straight line?

The excuse I made every hour on the hour this hour is gone.  
It would have been nice to see your profile outside of shadow.

I have nothing for breath  
& I am leaving now.

\*

Really, we are street snorkelers, versions of a vintage boot.  
They were wearing out well & I came dithering.

Excluded the middle, put another chair on the lawn.

I am intrigued by the color of you pinning the night down  
Every minute closes, lap at shore.

I have wanted silence I have wanted the under bed I have wanted bra strap.  
Make meaning out of a stare, ask a question after an image answers.

*My sun bunnies into a bush for the hot new brothel.  
When we hear a hill at night it needs to sit the fuck down.*

Look me in too, that I am mad for you in all this me, need to vent shadows.

There is at least one thing in every photograph to cut up & paste into the idea.

\*

The stairs rounding & would you consider turning into?

I don't surface well in a surrounding, mostly frame-for & counting forward.

You were listening to me. What I saw in your eyes, between open ears,  
an envelope awaiting seal.

That when I talk to myself while alone just to sound this head out differently—  
come the crowd—is sum difference.

Kids will actually run down the street & this is endless distraction.

I know you when your mouth opens, sending.

---

# Son of a Goat ... Part 1

Yes, the house fell down  
a woman screamed.

Mother I think.

Pictures fell off the wall, pipes burst  
upstairs in the bathroom  
the stand alone bath  
the one with brass lion legs  
bubbled like a cauldron  
cracked-clean-in-two  
someone called for help

it was Mother again I think.

Anyway, the water, boiling it was  
crashed through the floor  
ceramic tiles shattered  
plaster on the walls and ceilings cracked  
then the roof fell in.  
Shut the fuck up a voice said

Mother again I think

but I hadn't said anything  
honest.

Yes, if you must know  
I was afraid, I was terrified  
clutched teddy teardrop-tight

he had never been the same  
since someone burnt out  
his little plastic beady-bear eyes

Mother again I think.

Moving on, I ran  
as fast as little legs can carry  
the coffins of the parents  
who they themselves buried alive  
before they were born  
forget I said that  
it's finished, over, done with  
scratch it, scrub it, rub it out  
lets play truth or dare.

# Tammy: love in a children's home

Tammy came to my room in the night in her slip, she was braless and brainless and breathless and only thirteen. She would sit at the end of my bed and part her legs ever so slightly. And my heart would beat a good thump of it, as her nipples pressed hard against soft white cotton. And her flesh was an evil genius, and her flesh was a criminal mastermind, and her flesh was Moriarty.

*Oh Tammy, oh Tammy trembled the dust burn me, burn me, burn me.*

Then she spoke about men and the back seats of cars as she opened my window and unclipped the stars. I drooled at the mouth for the marmalade of her and I longed for the skin of her butterscotch thighs. I would give her the world, the land and the sea, and for the salt of her sweat I would throw in the skies. And her lips were the fall of mankind and her blue eyes were time spent in jail.

*Tamara, Tamara grovelled the night rev up the engines and fire out the lights, I am yours.*

And her scent was a Jedi mind trick and her innocence was an old man's tongue.

Tammy fucked every man on our street  
and came to my room in the night in her slip to torment me.  
They fucked her behind bushes and they beat her black in blue daylight.  
She seemed to enjoy the drama of it. I think it made Tammy feel grown up.

And her voice was a song and her skin was a life sentence.

*Tamara, Tamara God damn you to the gutters screamed the bright white light of the day as her teenage spaceship crashed somewhere in the silhouetted distance.*

Tammy came to my room in the night in her slip to torment me.  
With the flesh of her thighs and her bright blue eyes,  
and I pandered to the dust and I took great gulps of the thin air she breathed.  
Oh for one crumb of her navel. Oh for one spoonful of marmalade.  
Oh for young Tammy who was only thirteen with a body to cry for  
and a face that would launch a thousand fists.  
Tammy came to my room in the night in her slip,  
she was braless, and breathless, and brainless, and only thirteen.



---

# House of Bees

Dinner is at five, always at five  
that is when the new drones come.

No one questions Herself  
whose wings are the whole wide world.

We are spring-loaded rat-trap workers  
poised to sting the hand that feeds.

We are beyond pest control.  
Her Majesty's children.

Her song is the purr of the traffic outside  
and her eyes are the blacked-out windows of cars.

Hyper-vigilant is that what society calls us?  
What is wrong with that?

No one breathes a word  
no one tells and no one wilts.

Danny arrived at five today  
his eyes twitched from left to right.

No one batted an eyelid  
and no one asked him why.

He will snap within the next three days  
we all cracked-in-two within three.

Why are they staring at me he howls  
and who scrubbed out their faces?

He thrashes at the world  
fists and open palms swat the flashbacks.

Go now dear Danny, go to your Queen  
she wants only to love you.

Like no one else will, she will love you  
with solvents and sew up your eyes.

So go quick for winter is coming  
and when your face is scrubbed out

they won't see you cry and in the drone  
they won't hear you screaming.

from Milk & Honey

# Honey the Sky Ain't Going

Bad weather come, but best  
leave wind bone-break you,  
honey, good and down.

Honey leave the kids swim  
in cyanide tubs.

Leave them  
bloat-lips thank that bitter liquid  
for its warm tickle.

Leave  
lizard tongue in their veins,  
honey come bark-crawling down  
that no good lookout.

Honey 'member the song  
about sky-fall—*and here the sky*  
*and here the sky, and over here—*  
and we fell for it, dead-  
scared.

But bellbird lie, honey  
bellbird gone honey, now  
the sky sealed like cement honey  
and ain't we still under it?

# once

who were you the day  
you committed your worst sin?

what combination of cells?

sometimes the moon appears at sunset  
a full, yellow blur

sometimes it's small and blue  
against night's black-drop

once i even saw the moon on fire

# Me, You, and the Mole Rats

We were the chapters in a novel  
about wolves & woods & an autistic  
boy narrator. We rimmed our nostrils  
with sawdust. Not the high but the itch.  
Not the river but the overpass, where the chain-  
link fence still makes me think of death.  
If I could've grown a beard, I'd have done it.  
I was sick of my neck, of caked mud tec-  
tonics. The towns ran together like a wave  
of *peace be with yous* and my town  
sat in the dry mouth that didn't mean its words.  
We chucked hot bricks over the wall of wilderness.  
For the night watchmen, we ironed the trembling  
rivers from our faces. You unbuilt the picket  
fence. The tree house was hollowed by long-  
gone fire, now shaped like abandoned beetle skin.

The clouds poured down onto the sidewalk  
like a first wedding dress, and we were blessed  
to find the bride among them. She wore  
my eyes from her earlobes, held your soft hand  
against her cliff-side collarbone. "The moment  
she leaves the bastard," you told me (I prepared  
to agree), "you and I and all the mole  
rats in our wonder hive our up to erupt  
in wrong-handed fists for her." I agreed.  
Which one of us was the wolf, which one the boy?  
Who breathed the fog light to rattle the trees in their wood?

# If Any Draw Blood

I have pressed the nails of all my fingers into your skin.

I am waiting to see if any draw blood.

The ouroboros of your teeth,

the albatross wings breaking from your knuckles.

I could make a radio show, a broadcast of the creaking,  
the deep wave crashing, lighthouses falling to their knees

and begging forgiveness of the storm-side highway,  
of all the splintering floorboards in the house of you, your body.

The tide rises locust-like from your nape.

I crack a match upon your spine and let loose  
a bomb blast. I spiked your wine with gunpowder,  
darling, I tucked dynamite into your pillowcase.

Leave one light on, turn the radio up, goad it like a bull.

Wave the flags furled in your marrow.

I will pluck a feverous crowd from the garden

growing out of the bathroom sink. These nails,  
forgive them, these nails serve a purpose.

They can twinge all thickness of strings,

clear the dust from the lock,

coax your little hairs awake, stir them

from the soil of your nape. I will go too far:

build a drawbridge house of cards and let it fall  
when the boats come through. Light the candles  
of a birthday cake in the middle of a gas station.

If you let me, I will dig a hole in you  
and make a home there, but I'll be certain  
to keep the exit open as a hatchling's beak.

# Gouge

Sureness, absolute sureness.

I hid coffee filters in the bedroom. Took the necessary chores into the closet, left the clothes tangled and wet. All of this was done in a soft backlit light.

(It's a mysterious thing, the curves of the back and the indentations of stripped nails.)

Wind spits at the overhead lamp. He looked hard at the wiring, shook his head at the chalky rims. Glass. Glass drinking, drinking glass. Drunk.

The bark grips tighter in the bitterness of sundown. I move down the stairs, the clothes were ruined. All of this done by me and me alone, the back aches.



---

# Scavenger

I slice cocoons for silk. I carry a range of scars, rave about fire safety like a forest ranger. The cruelty of being endangered comes with its blessings. I carry beeswax lips, annoyed by caesuras hiding in towering tufts of grass. I spot trails of eraser

dust, little corrective larva squeaking in passive voice. They spell out *pilgrimages gather calm*. In this childhood, I splash in a vat of patchouli oil. I fashion a linchpin out of a wooden cadaver and cannot remember

where it belongs. There is a mean grimness to every age. In this childhood, death gently pecks at my forehead. I deliver flowers to my aunt at the cemetery. We share a caucus of awkward silences, eager for the other to speak.

# After School Special

In this childhood my mother runs a daycare. There are no perennial flowers. No newts being courted for fear of toxins, a green backyard because no German Shepherd digging up the grass with overfed claws. No fogbow despite infinity

mist. This is why the sky is full of hysteria and wisteria covers the trees. Everything carries the courage of Capri Sun, of string cheese. A flint timbers and my brother accidentally ignites a garage. Massacre of wood. As I lose faith in my own body

a lash wriggles in my retina. My eyesight weakens; I rummage through the nearby creek for glimmers of healing. The docile water trades my green eyes for stones and says *you now have two round conceits to see the world through granite*. I ask

this childhood what I am. I get an electroshock retort, a taser to the brain. My goose bumps watch over my biggest fear. Behind the next door might be a false floor hiding a mouth made of foam.

# The Fall of Luci

*"I have fallen as a kid into milk."*

Revolution is everywhere  
like god, its nemesis. That's an old quarrel. Parts of the sky  
fall down to earth, face down in a field.  
A woman called Luci,  
slowly devoured by life. At the bottom  
of everyone soaks their natural predator:  
in Luci's mug, god: and revolution  
lives in tired old bodies walking away from the revolution.  
At the bottom of this fusty text,  
fir needles, and my face.  
I'm sick. And adult.  
Can't wait for the snow  
to come and cover every single blade.  
I sit, read about surrealists & wonder do  
I still have some Parises in me  
to still live 'n dream? I dream. See a moving field  
blue and green in a thunderclap,  
its entry barred by the paws of tigers—  
"O tigers, you are just eternity lackeys—"  
"You've got to start thinking  
about time differently," they smile.  
"As a kind of flag." Then I'm inside:  
purple theater with moving walls, never seen so many friends, and  
those flags: each  
stands for a silence. A bud yet to be broken. "Shut up,  
you never even bothered to wake up!" And wow  
I hadn't. But now I'm awake.  
Clouds are going fast one way,  
night planes the other: the movement's  
everywhere! Only our Luci lies still

on the mud of language under which  
another . . .  
She's just a soiled kid's frock in some attic,  
first snow blowing through. In the fall  
of beautyfog of golds & mauves,  
once on a tapestry greenyear, you  
met Luci, and she  
had the grass of many springs  
inside her, said: "I'm surrounded  
by ends and frenemies. By rains I cannot name"—& as she walked  
into the archive of  
poetry, her concept,  
you zoned out & entered a kind  
of buzzy space: the archive of love.  
Now you're here, you may as well look  
at the future obituaries.  
Ride the teacup at  
the edge of a tawny waterfall: this is where  
the subway ends, the far ends of statuary.  
Hobble after revolt in the  
void piazzas of Wal Mart, and in the mirror, see  
firs with a side of wind—instead of limbs  
this tree has bones, like me: can you help me?  
But Luci just laugh'd and kept  
turning everything white. Luci.  
She knew she had to die in winter,  
and so she kept making it winter—  
what's this empty X inside her? Xmas?  
The tree men are angry. Parfait.  
What's that? And Luci

just smiled, "Don't be sorry you've stopped  
making sense. I've watched out for you  
ever since I fell from the sky of the avant  
to where you heart me, therefore we are."  
"For others,  
it's different; and bless the—  
those who laugh & fuck against the barricades,  
but you—  
not until you've tasted  
the greatest sick you're offered the  
vision of entering end fields  
on a tall red unicycle." . . . "In other words—"  
She went on. On a different planet,  
I just stood there alone, talking to myself.  
On a different planet, it was the dawn  
of revolution. My heart was simple. On another  
Luci was a well of secrets. On another  
she offers me an apple,  
I get swept  
away within an apple . . .

# a process of trial and error

it's embarrassing

to be alive

we will still want

make loops in the air

no dietary preference

no arms watching children drown

no authority of authors

the mothers have lost all money

in body imaginary

grow where

nothing else will

---

# The one who shot me

was reading aloud before it happened:

“I dreamt I was a controversy.”

Like a pool party to watch the world  
burn, we were evacuated on a Tuesday,  
saved on Friday by oysters, snappers,

groupers, but no blowfly; she stays behind.

The antidote was worse than knowing

I wanted this. Violence, you six-shot-  
deal. I remember the oven you

purchased. Name one:

I forget trying to remember  
to clean it. Hat, you have become  
a hand. Bullet, I thought you  
knew me better than that. Hand,  
I mistook you for a stop sign.

# The one who shot me next

didn't wear sunglasses. He looked good in whatever  
he wore, but he wasn't wearing yellow. He  
wasn't at the park. He wasn't at the mall.  
It was true. He was watching the scene

when access to parking spaces becomes less  
likely than thinking about it. Baroque, coded,  
straining, and vengeful, your best kept secrets  
murmur from beneath a bridge under a wall,  
yet we will never agree on how it happened.



---

# Elegy in Aqua

I locked eyes with my sister

in glass-green water.

I have seen birds drown.

I will not breathe water.

My sister is a fish.

I'm sure of it.

If she is not then I am a coward.

I am not a coward and therefore she is a fish.

My sister is

beautiful in the water.

This cannot be argued.

I am jealous of her.

I have watched her swim.

She can unseam

a beach at its hem.

I think she can command

the weather with her thoughts.

I am jealous.

She is superior in intellect and bravery.

My sister is a locksmith.

She can break my codes.

She is never-ending and if she dies

I will die.

I am jealous.

I once caught

a muskie that looked like her . . .

I wish it was her.

That fish consumed me.

She is stronger.

I am jealous.

If she is a muskie

then I can only hope

to be a northern pike,

an offshoot or a bastardization.

My body is not slick,

it is pocked and gravel-strewn.

My sister has teeth

like shells that rattle  
in water.

# Crown Heights, Brooklyn

Nothing is exact, not the body  
or the steps  
toward the subway, drunk  
folding June  
into the solstic arc we'd follow beneath  
street and city light.

Nostrand breathes. You bend  
the cigarette between black stones

remarkably red,  
have you been here all year?

My city is not your city,  
should she have been

I might not know how to spend you.

Buoyant catcalls rise above the  
mid-summer storm, shallow

in the sky. Dressed in flats  
you bend down  
to meet it. Your dress begins  
to wick, diminish,  
a flora of humid flame.

---

# Of the Table We Refurbished

Wood dust tumbling with breath in our lungs  
had us hacking inside our paper masks  
as we tugged the belt  
sander, 60 GRIT,  
across your Uncle's  
war-torn dining room table  
and thought *we'll never go hungry again.*

For Two Weeks on that solitary  
patch of grass outside our first  
floor walk-up we tried not to piss  
off the neighbors who would wait  
for a lull between grinds and bickering  
to say *damn, whatchu buildin a table for?*  
and one out of every three we'd kick  
on the machinery and yell:  
*not building. re-furb-ish-ing!*  
over the bray.

And we'd work until the first  
porch lights turned on and drag  
the deconstructed pieces to  
hunker, weary, on a plastic tarp  
in our living space  
for paint.

At This Point, those first nights,  
we'd share a shower but by the last  
you were just changing  
hats and dipping out to change

light bulbs at your mother's house,  
or whatever.

(and the last days still smell chemical  
like every fresh new re-  
coat in every corner. all those puddles.)

And when by god or by whiskey  
you left me (with the rent):

that Wild Thing from down the street  
I'd been making Scarlett O'Hara eyes at  
for FIFTEEN DAYS,

showed me how to rip out  
the one crooked leg and

cheered as I beat screaming  
splinters into its face

dent by dent  
until it was done.

---

# Crawl Spaces

lips puckered for a *cool wine*  
*cooler honey please*  
she lays hefty  
on a mound of thread  
counts and thread counts  
and royal purple duvet  
pregnant with dirt  
candy rose  
colored bargain  
basement prom  
dresses spooled with  
mascara tissues and  
every water cable  
gas electric  
bill since 1984.

a 19th century Caribbean  
Tallpost bed:  
hand carved mahogany  
palm and pineapple  
design gagging on  
the mound that  
strains under  
the woman. an antique reproduction  
Dutch colonial bureau: caged  
in the corner brims full with  
pearled china heaps of Lenox pumpkins  
carousels and unicorns. the nativity scene.

high gloss magazine carpets  
shiver over roaches who  
shiver over strawberry  
caps and chocolate foil.

in the hot July stifle  
copper striped wallpaper  
peels. her mess hall  
boudoir rotting.

bricks and bricks of molded towels  
her little son folded.



---

# Sprite Razorblades

I want a diamond face,  
a blockhead, a circle;

I will pass through  
time like a mannequin

and wake when you  
splash me with white

Gatorade. I am  
forever wet,

even in the  
desert, where

I am covered in  
sweat, in protoplasm.

The blades are like  
a licorice whip

used to tame a lion,  
or a raven with a

human body wearing  
a small white cloak

using a cane that  
turns into an angular  
snake that bites  
each individual hair,

painlessly.

---

# Making a Mom

I want to make a mother.  
Snap together her limbs,  
soften her skin,  
with a rolling pin, douse her  
hands in scents of bread-baking,  
and grass-blades.

I will assemble the bond  
piece-by-piece, install  
memories: fingering my fontanel, following  
my silhouette's totter on a moonlit beach.

I will program her heart  
to soften like warm dough.  
We will construct  
the idea of permanence  
in each other: my body lying like a stage  
each day.

As she rusts and corrodes, I will deconstruct her  
parts: build a small cottage  
to visit, kindle fires during cold rain.

# Make It Sound Like Something Wet

And this is what you can do with a *hen*, I tell her. The feeling of being weightless. Molecular changes. Make it wear diamonds. Make it make maki. Make it sing. Throw all the eggs in the disposal, but wash them first.

A box sits on the side of the road, full of *wet* eggs. My hair is *wet*. The common room is *wet*. My calendar is *wet*. The nice thing about being *wet* is that you gleam.

We jump rope and then some. *Sounds like* two bodies slapping against a wall, then peeking around the corner to hear the other side. *Sounds like* a drawstring being pulled. *Sounds like* a phone being puked up.

She pushes a wisp of hair behind my ear [hers or mine I'm not sure] and asks me about the *singing* and I say, what do you mean *singing*.

# I Purge Our Farm and She Claims Me.

*You can't cure darkness with a bucket.*

Somehow it had grown up in my tin,  
a mix of water-wind, in spools spun  
I threw it down, somewhat turbine bitten,  
a little frayed. Turning fans, a plunder  
not yet visible, maybe physical  
in shape, its ancestor a staircase,  
a sheet that covers the steps for display

*And you certainly can't cure it with watercress.*

In between stalks I draw out boxes  
the velour ribbons tied, debris caked under.  
Is this how wind should be farmed, melded—  
a hot cookie sheet of white chocolate,  
a boy who's carried away in tumult,  
found three miles away from home,  
mumbling. To farm wind is to farm God.

*Petina causes darkness to unravel.*

Red nails in the sloppy sick, picking out  
the little brown seeds my thumbs are too big for.  
A wedding band rusts in the cold, clear soup  
of agency. A TV's on in my dreams, but in real  
life it's just a black box on a dirt mound,  
outside of our house.

# In June Like We Said but I Fell Out of Love

It has become a deep, obnoxious spiritual battle deciding  
whether to leave the plastic covering over all my furniture.

It's obnoxious because I think it implicates me either way.

I'm afraid of being downloaded and digitalized into a computer brain  
and forced to live the rest of my life knowing too much,

my gray wires spooling around the factory floor touching  
the ocean of now unnecessary human bodies.

You're afraid of not being a compelling candidate for kindness.

Once I went to a costume party for the end of the world where I was a meteor  
and my friend a blue-jay who scattered feathers

all over the room with her dancing.

After she was just a pale molted dress we sat there drinking

tequila on the roof and I was one year older.

She wore a mask for whatever reason covered in thousands

of tiny, blue crystals.

My meteor dress had started to pull apart at the craters.

We talked about how everybody just wants to be happy

without ever really trying.

She said yes but let's pretend we're different,  
shaking a small fist at nothing in particular.

So we stayed up there in the dark for a while thinking  
about what to think.

*(Soma)tic Poetry Exercise & Poem*

# Aphrodisios Cogitation

*for Erica Kaufman*

Wash a penny, rinse it, slip it under your tongue and walk out the door. Copper is the metal of Aphrodite, never ever forget this, never, don't forget it, ever. Drink a little orange juice outside and let some of the juice rest in your mouth with the penny. Oranges are the fruit of Aphrodite, and she is the goddess of Love, but not fidelity. Go somewhere, go, get going with your penny and juice. Where do you want to sit? Find it, and sit there.

What is the best Love you've ever had in this world? Be quiet while thinking about that Love. If someone comes along and starts talking, quietly shoo them away, you're busy, you're a poet with a penny in your mouth, idle chit chat is not your friend. Be quiet so quiet, let the very sounds of that Love be heard in your bones. After a little while take the penny out of your mouth and place it on the top of your head. Balance it there and sit still a little while, for you are now moving your own forces quietly about in your stillness. Now get your pen and paper and write about POVERTY, write line after line about starvation and deprivation from the voice of one who has been Loved in this world.



# Shovel Gives Into Its Name

*“Shopping without money is a challenge with the cameras.”*  
—my mother

why are you trembling dear one  
my president has come to free you

hair flying at  
bullet’s impact  
the shooter’s beautiful  
crooked teeth

argued up the evolution of  
borrowed faces to  
angle potent

my pregnancy dream told me  
not born but evicted

length mopped over later  
operating a forgotten bell

Venus stipulates a  
freedom not to be dismissed or  
every grip weakens  
smell it to  
see it  
a joint groans inside its  
flesh casing

“have sent it  
inside” means  
thinking deeper on it as  
other waves  
proceed through

we cannot train  
ourselves to feel less

a silent  
misuse of the ordinary until this  
moment cannot stand  
on its own

each failed attention  
sent stinking  
pulling your ass apart in  
your sleep

no beverage  
eliminates the  
hunger  
ask our  
kicked open  
bartender as we  
bend from  
the ceiling with  
a fresh ocean-catch  
aftertaste

watch through a  
hollowed-out bone our  
perfection of  
brutality as  
efficiency

suddenly lacking  
courage to  
steal every  
day's larder

emptying pockets slower  
does not bring us to a  
new sense of  
where we left off

aggravate over our  
dumb scratch the  
dead can I  
promise you

# Concerning Necessity

I constructed a kind of dusk  
to live in and the world shrunk  
small as my skull

though I once trusted that form  
could at least lend structure  
the way a sonnet is a cell  
or a letter a confession

or an argument over ethics  
a veiled debate over how to govern  
our bodies in dark

but it was his real human arm, slung  
careless and heavy across my hip  
that broke me away from my brain  
which would like to think it can control  
the physical world, that lesser sphere—

but right then, I was there.  
And how unhooked to him.

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# There are My Secrets and I like having Secrets

what happened in the room of Styrofoam cups and the dirty microwave

if you give a gift expecting one in return, that isn't generosity  
that's bartering

what happened in the room of crooked sconces, tissue boxes, and lucky bamboo

why I punched

what happened in the room with the dirty olive carpet and the crooked step,  
the scalloped lace curtains and gold rod, the rusty window hinge,  
the red throw pillow

happiness, it turned out, was the wrong word

what happened in the room with the old static radio, the room that stank like  
Camels

why I snuck out before anyone woke up

what happened in the room with the dado rail that divided the wall in half  
like a belt

the helium balloon but also the wrist upon which the string is tied

# An Inconvenient Wife

*for Soraya Manutchehri*

I. *The boy with rock in hand*

The stones are warm from the sun.  
The body and I are both sweating.  
I expect the rocks to thud like soil,  
but the sound is wet cloth against a washing stone.

We throw rocks because  
we are supposed to.  
We are holy.

This is duty.  
We throw the rocks  
our fathers hand us.

Most people aim for the chest  
to see the body cave like a beaten rug.  
I aim higher

until it crumples back to ground  
like wilted crops grown heavy.

There is no fight in the buried torso.  
Beyond heartbeat,  
there is no woman in the body we bludgeon.

II. *The mother*

We paid him to take her—  
make a wife of our child.

To serve in her office as I had taught her:

*Do your work,*

*take him to your bed,*

*be faithful*

*and do not complain.*

I could have told him to wait.

That he was more eager to wed

than to be a husband.

But duty compels us.

Would you tell her not to marry?

Better to be a woman

wasted and forgotten

than endure a marriage to him?

I spoke to her of duty,

the womb as sacred,

the legacy of sons,

rewards of heaven.

I told her to stay.

I would never tell her not

to fight back. When death

in the form of men comes for you,

your claws and wild blows

are the body's only instinct.

To fight back,

if only at the end.

III. *The dead woman*

There were dishes in the sink,  
the floors unswept,  
clothes pinned to the line,  
sheets crisp and clean.  
My duties almost done for the day.

They waited to take me  
until after my family had been fed.

My ears were all static,  
but the burning in my throat told me  
I must have been screaming,

not in outrage,  
but the sound of suffering released,  
a boiling kettle.  
I was as surprised by it as the men  
who dragged me away.

They were clumsy with restraining me  
as if none of them had ever  
held a woman enraged.

I wondered if I could have taken him  
all of this time,  
but it is easier to say can't  
than die trying.



If I had thought it was an option,  
I would have clawed his eyes out,  
broken dinner plates against his skull,  
drowned my children before he  
could turn them against me.

# Tipping Point

When my mother says *depressed*,  
I respond, *roller-coaster hiccup*.  
Say, *the world isn't round*,  
remind her of moon and waves.

My body says, *exhaustion*,  
creaks like restless sleep.  
Every step is sand bags  
and rusty hinges.

My cracks are showing.  
My mom wants to make sure I've noticed.  
She makes me tea.

I say, *the sky stopped falling*,  
thank her for believing me.  
She worries into the steam  
and wishes I cried more.

# Hello, I Am Here

I call the dairymaid often.

To yap, is too loud.

I'm searching for the most negligible quiet.

What I don't want is a picture with the Grand Canyon.

I feel like people are only talking about other people.

Not talking *with* their present-company-people.

Consumerism makes me nervous.

It's like, then what?

Many little novelty experiments.

I'm searching for the tiniest claustrophobia.

# The Wonderful Whole of Everything

A. The Internet says “thanatophobia” is fear of not existing. I’m not afraid of not existing, I’d just like to know if I am. Old Descartes said, *Cogito ergo sum!*, and I guess so. By the way, have you ever seen Descartes? In all his portraits he has long black hair, a pirate mustache, and looks like a Black Crowe. A lot of the classic philosophers were nutty. For example, Pascal, who had a clean face, said Descartes wasn’t Catholic enough, and that his philosophy dispensed with God. Descartes told Pascal to go to hell.

B. I write these words, and Jesus hangs above my desk. I should say, a hand drawn picture of Jesus (robed, sandals) playing soccer with kids (short shorts, general 80s attire) hangs above my desk. In the picture, Jesus kicks the ball with natural soccer form, and everyone’s running and smiling, and Jesus is obviously pretty awesome. It’s silly and perfect. It’s my icon, my only resonant religious thing.

C. Other things are above my desk, like this quote: “Let a man go to the bottom of what he is and believe in that.” I got that from a book.

D. In another book, Robert Graves said, “Christian legend, dogma, and ritual are the refinement of a great body of primitive and even barbarous beliefs.” Yes, this is true, too.

E. Then there’s this: “Beer is proof God loves us and wants us to be happy.” Benjamin Franklin was a deist and is on stamps and money.

F. You see, it gets confusing.

# It's Like to Be

1. For years, I debated what image I'd get permanently emblazoned in my skin. I wondered where I should label myself, whether mom would disown me if I rocked killer ink. Once, I almost did it, but I didn't have \$300 and my credit card balance was uncomfortable. Mostly, I couldn't decide on something that would represent me forever. The only hard rule I made for myself was "don't get a neck tattoo," aka: a job-killer. Job-killers work for certain NBA players and the mean-looking guys you come across in rural movie theatre parking lots. And tweakers—tweakers have them.
2. I'm from Oklahoma, and I'm proud of it. So I got Oklahoma tattooed on my shoulder, like a real stud. Not the word "Oklahoma," but the outline of the state. I could've got a John Deere tractor or a full-up grain silo, or even the abbreviation "OK," but I like the look of the land, the shape of the state. Sometimes when I'm toweling off, I look in the mirror at my face and body and arm and Oklahoma and think, "That's all me."
3. In the last ten years, I've spent two months in Oklahoma. I've lived everywhere else. It's been three years since I walked the flat dirt of my hometown, bought a cheeseburger from Dairy Queen, spooked an armadillo. But Oklahoma will always be in me, or be me. Like that old adage: "You can take the frog out of the river . . . ."
4. Other things are in me, or are me, and always will be: rainbow colorful things, tiny gorilla things that know my name and speak to me in Mandarin, milk-thin paper things I floated away from years ago. I suppose *that's* what this is about—the tattoo, the words. Oklahoma makes sense to me, and I am that. Everything else is cornmeal.

# No Way from White Haven

On our last vacation together we found ourselves in White Haven near the Lehigh Gorge, where people packed against their next-doors. Upward the mountains spined, layering every roof one upon another in disjointed scales. The whole town laid out like a frozen fish. I couldn't look away from that place, rigged in wood-rot fencing and devil-may-care. If love is a word in those parts, it would splinter under unsaid. You asked what they do with all the snow when it comes. Build the labyrinths, I answered. Hide a minotaur at each carved center.

From the windowless corner bar a man pitched himself toward the gathering dumpster. We crossed every street twice, the last grocery, a rust ridden rail station. We stopped the car above the gorge on the White Haven side where a whipple truss bridge valved between enter and exit, where the sky widened like a grateful mouth gaping fresh air before the snow could let down its silent, silvered lid.

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# Self-Portrait, 1984

Dad says I'll end up a dyke  
from playing ice hockey.  
And my big brother says a dyke  
is a girl who likes other girls.  
And I don't like girls at all;  
they only play jump rope  
at recess. And Jackie Wightman  
smells like fruit every single day.

Sometimes no one can keep my mom  
from crying. I think the frying pans  
get grease in her eyes when she cooks.  
So I always say I don't like anything hot.  
It's ok to lie about food, I think.

When I take my bike out into the horse trails,  
there are towers that make a sound  
like a baby singing. Only the babies  
are invisible. My Dad says no one  
is invisible but God. Sometimes,  
I pretend the barn is my house.  
Sometimes, I take my bike apart  
and put it back together all morning.

No one knows what I can do.  
If you won't tell, I'll jump no hands  
from the hayloft door.  
I made a house out of boxes  
in the woods. I could live there  
if I wanted, if I wasn't scared

of tree limbs snatching me up from there.  
My Dad says trees are alive.  
And I think they just might  
do something bad if they could.



# In Second Grade Robby O'Reilly Punches Me in the Eye Because I Lose the Gardener Snake We Found in the Woods

*Put the lid on tight, he said.*

The snake was yellow  
yellow like a bee's body  
yellow like a dandelion  
yellow like a summer's day  
yellow like the belly of a yellow fish  
its body thick and long  
its face rough like a fire sung rock song.

*The snake escaped, I don't know how, I said.*

*Loser, he said and punches.*  
And as I lay pulling back tears in the grass,  
as I watch the sky above me spin like a blue white top  
I imagine the snake turning into a river, its body  
exploding into water, its skin clear liquid  
encircling the rocks, its tail a winding water  
through the trees, emptying out  
into an endless ocean, black and blue.

# The Kind of Man I Am At the DMV

“Mommy, that man is a girl,” says the little boy  
pointing his finger, like a narrow spotlight,  
targeting the center of my back, his kid-hand  
learning to assert what he sees, his kid-hand  
learning the failure of gender’s tidy little  
story about itself. I try not to look at him

because, yes that man is a girl. I, man, am a girl.  
I am the kind of man who is a girl and because  
the kind of man I am is patient with children  
I try not to hear the meanness in his voice,  
his boy voice that sounds like a girl voice  
because his boy voice is young and pitched high  
like the tent in his pants will be years later  
because he will grow to be the kind of man  
who is a man, or so his mother thinks.

His mother snatches his finger from the air,  
*of course he’s not*, she says, pulling him  
back to his seat, *what number does it say we are?*  
she says to her boy, bringing his attention  
to numbers, to counting and its solid sense.

*But he has earrings*, the boy complains  
now sounding desperate like he’s been  
the boy who cries wolf, like he’s been  
the hub of disbelief before, but this time  
he knows he is oh so right. The kind  
of man I am is a girl, the kind of man  
I am is push ups on the basement

floor, is chest bound tight against himself,  
is thick gripping hands to the wheel  
when the kind of man I am drives away  
from the boy who will become a boy  
except for now while he's still a girl voice,  
a girl face, a hairless arm, a powerless hand.  
*That boy is a girl* that man who is a girl  
thinks to himself, as he pulls out of the lot,  
his girl eyes shining in the Midwest sun.

# Composition

Moved the dead bird  
from the grass  
in the afternoon  
cut back the bushes  
above the front porch  
where later  
you open willing  
to the night air.

# St. Lucy's Night

*for Jean*

That houselight, lowest star. The leaf blowers are quiet. The longest sentences have all abated. This one day ends at midnight, like all the rest. Ordinary nothing John Donne said. There are books all over the house, most closed, a few open. The mind is so small that the heart cannot pronounce it.



# contributors





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**CA Conrad** is the son of a white trash asphyxiation, his childhood included selling cut flowers along the highway for his mother and helping her shoplift.

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**Sean Kilpatrick**, is the author of *Anatomy Courses* (Lazy Fascist, 2012) and *fuckscapes* (Blue Square, 2011). His poems appear or are forthcoming in *Libra/Libera* (Croatia), *Evergreen Review*, *No Colony*, *Action Yes*, *New York Tyrant*, *Fence*, *LIT*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Caketrain*, *Tarpaulin Sky*, *La Petite Zine*, *Spork*, among others.

**Becca Klaver** is the author of the poetry collection *LA Liminal* (Kore Press, 2010), a co-founder of the feminist poetry press Switchback Books, and a former editor of *Columbia Poetry Review*. She lives in Brooklyn, NY, and goes to school in New Brunswick, NJ, where she's studying for PhD qualifying exams in feminist theory and 20th-century U.S. innovative poetics. She and Andrew Koszewski have recently co-published a chapbook, *Seer/Sucka* (Dusie Kollektiv, 2011), which you can also read online at [dusie.org](http://dusie.org).

**Luke Laubhan** lives in Seattle, Washington, where he is an MFA candidate at the University of Washington. His poems have most recently appeared in *Down in the Dirt*.

**Thomas Patrick Levy** is author of *I Don't Mind If You're Feeling Alone* (YesYes Books, 2012) and *Please Don't Leave Me Scarlett Johansson* (Vinyl 45s Chapbook Series, 2011). He lives in southern California where he designs websites and eBooks. Google "Thomas Patrick Levy" for additional and more interesting information.

**Jeffrey McDaniel** is the author of four books, most recently *The Endarkenment* (University of Pittsburgh Press). He teaches at Sarah Lawrence College.

**Irene McKinney** (1939-2012) lived in rural West Virginia, where she was Director of the low residency MFA program at West Virginia Wesleyan. The most recent of her five books is *Unthinkable: Selected Poems* (Red Hen, 2009). An earlier book, *Six O'Clock Mine Report*, was recently reissued in the Carnegie Mellon Contemporary Classics Series. This issue of *Columbia Poetry Review* is dedicated to her memory. Irene passed away while the issue was in production. She will be greatly missed by her family, friends, students, and grateful readers.

**Tony Mancus** lives in Rosslyn, VA with his wife Shannon and two cats. He works as a test writer and a writing instructor. His poems have most recently appeared in *Sixth Finch*, *The Seattle Review*, *Destroyer*, and *Dark Sky*.

**Brian Miles** lives in Chicago, where he is pursuing an MFA in Poetry.

**Sid Miller** is the author of two collections of poetry, *Nixon on the Piano* (David Robert Book, 2009) and *Dot-to-Dot, Oregon* (Ooligan Press, 2009). His work has appeared widely, including recently in *Filter Literary Journal*, *Poor Claudia*, *Juked*, and *Linebreak*. He lives in Portland, where he serves as the editor of *Burnside Review* and the director for *Crow Arts Manor*.

**Jennifer Moore** is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Program for Writers at the University of Illinois at Chicago. She has work published in *Barrow Street*, *14 Hills*, *Hayden's Ferry Review*, *Fugue*, and elsewhere, and she is Poetry Editor of *Another Chicago Magazine*.

**Carrie Murphy** grew up in Baltimore, MD and received an MFA from New Mexico State University. Her first collection of poems, *PRETTY TILT*, will be published by Keyhole Press in 2012.



**Stephen Murray** is a poet, author and adventurer who lives in Galway on the West coast of Ireland, where he works as director of Inspireland, a literary project for schools. He has won numerous awards for his work and is widely published in Britain and Ireland. His critically acclaimed debut collection *House of Bees* was published in April 2011 by Salmon Poetry.

**Nick Narbutas** lives in Chicago, where he is about to complete his BA in Creative Writing: Poetry at Columbia College. His work has previously appeared online in *MUZZLE Magazine*.

**William Olsen's** most recent collection of poetry is *Sand Theory* (Triquarterly: Northwestern, 2011). He teaches at Western Michigan University and at Vermont College.

**Patti Pangborn** is from the small town of Stanwood in the beautiful state of Michigan. She earned her BA at Central Michigan University. She is currently living in Chicago and earning her second BA in Creative Writing: Poetry at Columbia College Chicago. Her hobbies include knitting half a scarf, holding cats and digging up old memories. This is her first publication.

**Aimee Penna** received an MFA from the Bennington Writing Seminars in 2009. She currently lives outside of Philadelphia where she's an instructor of ESL and Freshman Composition. She's also a part-time editorial assistant at *The American Poetry Review* and a member of the Philadelphia Stories poetry board.

**Courtney Queeney's** first collection, *Filibuster to Delay a Kiss and Other Poems*, was published by Random House in 2007. Her work has appeared in *American Poetry Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Believer*, *Black Warrior Review*, *McSweeney's*, and *Notre Dame Review*. She lives in Chicago.

**Michael Robins** is the author of *Ladies & Gentlemen* (Saturnalia Books, 2011) and *The Next Settlement* (UNT Press, 2007). Recent poems can be found in *American Letters & Commentary*, *The Antioch Review*, *Colorado Review*, *Mid-American Review*, and elsewhere. Born in Portland, Oregon, he teaches poetry and literature at Columbia College Chicago.

**Kathleen Rooney** is a founding editor of Rose Metal Press, and the author, most recently, of the essay collection *For You, For You I Am Trilling These Songs*. Her second poetry collection, *Robinson Alone Provides the Image*, is forthcoming in Fall 2012 from Gold Wake Press. She lives in Chicago.

**Andrew Ruzkowski** is currently in the MFA program at Columbia College Chicago.

**Eugene Sampson** lives in Chicago. Recent literary translations have appeared online in *The Quarterly Conversation* or are forthcoming in print in *Essayists on the Essay: Montaigne to our Time*, from the University of Iowa Press.

**Patrick Samuel** lives in Chicago where he is pursuing his MFA at Columbia College. His work has appeared in *elima*, *5\_Trope* and *<kill author*.

**Kat Sanchez** lives in Chicago. Her poems are published or forthcoming in *Syntax*, *Cut-Bank*, *PANK*, *Bateau*, and others. She is the layout and design editor for *Fifth Wednesday Journal*. Right now, she is having a late-night snack of fudge and is about to start reading Kurt Vonnegut's *Welcome to the Monkey House*.

**Zach Savich** is the author of three collections of poetry, including *The Firestorm*, as well as a book of prose, *Events Film Cannot Withstand*. He teaches at Shippensburg University.

**Alex Schmidt** is currently living in Charlotte, NC, where he attends Queens University en route to an MFA in Creative Writing, Poetry. He has most recently been published in *Poets/Artists* magazine's 2011 collaboration issue (poetsandartists.com) with a poem titled "Self-Portrait as Introversion".

**Maureen Seaton** has authored fifteen poetry collections, solo and collaborative—most recently, *Stealth, with Sam Ace* (Chax Press, 2011); *Sinéad O'Connor and Her Coat of a Thousand Bluebirds, with Neil de la Flor* (Sentence Book Award, Firewheel Editions, 2011); and *Cave of the Yellow Volkswagen* (Carnegie Mellon, 2009). She writes a column celebrating poetry at <http://almostdorothy.wordpress.com/category/themes/glit-lit> and teaches at the University of Miami. ([www.maureenseaton.com](http://www.maureenseaton.com))

**Rob Schlegel** is the author of *The Lesser Fields*, winner of the 2009 Colorado Prize for Poetry, and *January Machine*, forthcoming from Four Way Books. He lives in Iowa City, and teaches at Cornell College.

**Gregory Sherl**'s most recent books include *The Oregon Trail is the Oregon Trail* (MLP, 2012) and *Monogamy Songs* (Future Tense Books, 2012), as well as the chapbook *Last Night Was Worth Talking About* (NAP, 2012). Currently, he lives in his childhood bedroom in Pembroke Pines, Florida.

**Sandra Simonds** is the author of *Mother Was a Tragic Girl* (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2012) and *Warsaw Bikini* (Bloof Books, 2009). She lives in Tallahassee, Florida.

**Aaron Smith** is the author of *Blue on Blue Ground* (2005) and the forthcoming collection *Appetite* (2012), both published by the University of Pittsburgh Press. He teaches at West Virginia Wesleyan College.

**Rachel Smith Horton** loves a good scarf and working with students. She earned an MFA in Poetry from Columbia College Chicago and is completing an MA in English Literature at Loyola University Chicago.

**Sarah Tarkany** was born in Charleston, SC. She currently enjoys a happy life in Chicago where she attends Columbia College Chicago in pursuit of her MFA in Poetry.

**Jennifer Tatum-Cotamagaña's** work is published in *South Loop Review Online: Creative Nonfiction +Art* and in *1913: a journal of forms*. She is an assistant editor for *Hotel Amerika*, an MFA candidate in Columbia College Chicago's Nonfiction program and an instructor of Writing and Rhetoric.

**Glenn Taylor** is originally from Detroit, Michigan, and continues to be a huge Detroit sports fan. In his spare time, he writes music, power watches Netflix, and relives early childhood sports memories through various adult sports leagues. He is in the MFA program at Columbia College Chicago, and his work has appeared in *elimae* and *Prick of the Spindle*.

**Erin Teegarden** lives in Chicago. Her work has appeared in: *Another Chicago Magazine*, *the Bellingham Review*, *5AM*, *PMS* (poemmemoirstory), *Little White Poetry Journal*, and *Pittsburgh's City Paper*, among others. Her work is forthcoming in the anthologies *21/21/Chicago*, and the ekphrastic collection, *Hannah*.

**Jennie Thompson** originally from Kentucky, lives in North Carolina where she teaches writing at Guilford College. Her poetry has been featured recently in *New York Quarterly*, *the Mid-American Review*, and the *Mississippi Review* as well as recognized by *Gulf Coast*.

**Maureen Thorson's** first book of poetry, *Applies to Oranges*, was published in 2011 by Ugly Duckling Presse. She lives in Washington, DC, where she co-curates the In Your Ear reading series at the DC Arts Center.

**Stacey Waite** is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Nebraska–Lincoln. Waite's poems have been published most recently in *Bloom*, *Black Warrior Review*, *Pinch*, and *The Rattling Wall*. Waite's most recent collections of poetry include: *the lake has no saint* (Tupelo Press, 2010) and a forthcoming collection *Butch Geography* (Tupelo Press, 2013).

**Tara Walker** lives in Chicago where she works as a literary arts educator at Urban Gateways and as an instructor of writing and literature at Westwood, Wright and Truman Colleges. She received her MFA from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. Her work has most recently appeared in *elima*, *Requited* and *After Hours*.

**Stephen Neal Weiss** is completing an MFA in poetry at NYU and has published poems in *Best New Poets 2011*, *42Opus* and *NewYorker.com*. His prose has appeared in *Black-Book*, *Gourmet*, *NYMag.com*, *Out* and *Salon.com*. He is the co-author, with his wife Casey Kait, of *Digital Hustlers: Living Large and Falling Hard in Silicon Alley* (HarperCollins, 2001). They live with their children in South Orange, New Jersey.

**Joshua Marie Wilkinson**'s recent works are *Selenography* (Sidebrow Books 2010); *Poets on Teaching* (University of Iowa Press, 2010); and *Made a Machine by Describing the Landscape*, a tour film about Califone (IndiePix, 2011). He lives in Tucson and teaches at the University of Arizona.

**Wendy Xu** is the author of the chapbook *The Hero Poems* (H\_NGM\_N BKS). Recent poems have appeared, or are forthcoming in *CutBank*, *Diagram*, *The American Poetry Journal*, *MAKE*, *Drunken Boat*, and others; She lives in Northampton, MA.

**Joshua Young** is the author of *When the Wolves Quit: A Play-in-Verse* (Gold Wake Press). He holds an MA in English from Western Washington University and studies poetry in the MFA program at Columbia College Chicago. He lives in Chicago with his wife, their son, and their dog.





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Irene McKinney	Jeffrey Allen	Celeste Gainey
Sid Miller	Jennifer Moore	Daniel Khalastchi
Mark Jay Brewin, Jr.	Carrie Murphy	Wes Jamison
T.J. DiFrancesco	Tony Mancus	Esvie Coemish
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Elaine Equi	Jennifer Tatum-Cotamagaña	Aimee Penna
Kat Sanchez	Meghan Forajter	Nick Narbutas
Jeffery Conway	Erin Teegarden	Ali Doerscher
Sandra Beasley	Glenn Taylor	Stephen Danos
Jeff Alessandrelli	Michael Robins	Ana Božičević
Patti Pangborn	Sarah Tarkany	Jennifer Karmin
Jeffrey McDaniel	Alex Schmidt	Erica Bernheim
Davee Craine	Perrin Carrell	Andrew Ruzkowski
Joshua Marie Wilkinson	Michael Homolka	Chris Caldemeyer
Gregory Sherl	Kathleen Rooney	Tara Boswell
Patrick Samuel	Elisa Gabbert	C.S. Ward
Nicole Cooley	Maureen Seaton	Courtney Hitson
Jennie Thompson	Liz Chereskin	Kate Magnolia Glasgow
Maureen Thorson	Doug Paul Case	Wendy Xu
Scott Keeney	Smarie Clay	CA Conrad
Eugene Sampson	Joshua Young	Courtney Queeney
Richard Greenfield	Brian Miles	Denise Duhamel
Rachel Horton	Rob Schlegel	Emily Rose Kahn-Sheahan
Zach Savich	Ryan Courtwright	Zachary Green
Sandra Simonds	Becca Klaver	Luke Laubhan
Jeanne Marie Beaumont	Kelly Bates	Lindsay D'Andrea
Thomas Patrick Levy	CM Burroughs	Stacey Waite
Amanda Cade	Brenda Hillman	William Olsen
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