

CLOUD PLEASER

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A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts
in Creative Writing

Northern Arizona University

May 2023

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ABSTRACT

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“Sometimes I think it’s all one big affectation.”

— John Ashbery, “Involuntary Description”

If I have anything like a fundamental theory about poetry, it might be that poetry is a dubious business. What is it, anyway? Where’s the line between poetry and prose? Between poetry and scuba diving, for that matter? Just what is the point of putting together a series of words like “orange buggy smoker blimp Aristotle soup”? I don’t really know, and not knowing is the state from which my poems proceed and return to in a constantly evolving flux. Bad poetry is very sure of itself. My poems are anything but sure of themselves. They’re always teetering on the edge of something, never settling down except temporarily, when the end of the poem and the white space that follows enforce a pause while the voice of the poem stops to collect itself before starting the next one. In my poems I take apart the English language and don’t quite put it together again. I’m trying to explore the nooks and crannies of consciousness that can’t be reached through the conventional meaning-making that language is generally used for.

The best poets have always pushed the language into new areas of discovery, but Gertrude Stein really got the ball rolling when it came to dismantling English in a truly profound way. *Tender Buttons* is a book I return to frequently before I sit down to write poetry. The

tumbling energy and brazenness of it feels newer and more refreshing than a lot of today's poetry. It was surely the punk rock of its day.

The pure pleasure of music is something else I aim for in poetry. Music (especially instrumental music) doesn't have to worry about being *about* anything. The pleasures of sound and the bodily energy of music are qualities I try to keep close to me as I write, because I think there's no reason a highly literary poem can't be as thrilling as a Pixies song. And like a Pixies song, a poem of mine often contains phrases and images that delight in being weird for weirdness's sake, and whose meanings are happily obscure. Indeed, it's interesting how nonsense is accepted much more readily in pop music and pop culture than it is in contemporary American poetry. "Elementary penguin singing Hare Krishna / Man, you should have seen them kicking Edgar Allan Poe" John Lennon sings in a song beloved by millions. By contrast, the suspicion of nonsense in poetry, the view of it as sophomoric child's play, means that the kind of poetry we could for lack of better terms call experimental or avant-garde—but which I just like to call weird—is still relegated to a tiny niche audience, even within the already niche realm of poetry. Weird poetry that does find a wider audience often consists of a tamed, watered-down weirdness that many readers find more digestible.

John Ashbery is a rare exception to this rule. Ashbery, who should have won the Nobel Prize instead of Bob Dylan, found a way to reach mainstream (by poetry-world standards) success through the utter originality, depthless richness, and sheer genius of what he wrote. It's supposed to be uncool to be an Ashbery imitator, since there are supposedly so many (though are there, really?), but to read him as deeply as I have and then not to want to at least try to do what

he did is impossible for me to fathom. It's a temptation that's useless for me to resist, and no one ever achieved anything worthwhile in the arts by resisting temptation. (Is that true? I don't know, but it sounds good, which is a key component of my poetics.) Ashbery's poetry evolved considerably over his seven-decade career, so if you're going to imitate him, at least there are a lot of different modes to imitate. In this collection, poems like "Lucky Lacunae," "What Matters in College?" and "Works and Despair" are heavily influenced by the work he produced in his nineteen-seventies heyday. Poems like this feature longer sentences and more abstraction, where the appeal lies chiefly in the tingling complexities created by pile-ups of clauses that threaten to go on forever. The influence of his later, nineties-to-aughts period can be found in poems like "Code of Silence," "Onward, Christian Golfers," "Tourist Trap," and the title poem, "Cloud Pleaser." These poems are less philosophical, more jokey and colorful, often using shorter sentences and more images. My hope, in any case, is that my inevitable failure to write a poem with exactly the same sort of brilliance that Ashbery could bring to his work will result in poems that do after all sound like me rather than him.

But Ashbery is by no means the only poet in whose work I find inspiration. Some of the poems in this collection are directly influenced by younger poets, some of whom are still with us. Poems with more of a narrative, like "Cake vs. Beer," "Supine Trilogy," and "Epiphany," can be compared to the humorous surrealism of James Tate and Michael Earl Craig (who was also influenced by Tate). Poems like "On the Lookout," "The Fever," and "By the Way" show the influence of poets like Graham Foust and Julie Doxsee, whose work warps syntax with a playful precision that imbues the lines with a high degree of tension and torque. Some of the more extreme disruptions of language, in poems like "The Widening Gyre," "Flashing Scents," and

“The Last Resort,” can be traced partly to Clark Coolidge, Michael Gizzi, and other poets affiliated directly or tangentially with the Language poets. Poems like these have an even more defiantly avant-garde “punk” spirit than the others in this collection. Still other poems like “Pittsburgh Haibun,” “Career Development,” and “Pop Quiz” owe something to the friendly and accessible but offbeat humor of Ron Padgett. Finally, “Barbie’s Alien Baby’s First Botox Debacle” is a straight-up homage to the reigning queen of Flarf, Sharon Mesmer. I could name other poets who have probably influenced my work in small ways, but it would be a very long list indeed. No doubt I’m influenced by anyone I happen to be reading at the moment. Poetry, more than life itself, is what inspires me to write poetry.

Such a variety of influences makes for a highly eclectic collection, but I would defend this grab-bag approach on the grounds that the main thing I aim for in my poetry is surprise. I never know what the next line will be as I’m writing a poem, and I like the idea of taking this same unexpectedness to the overall structure of the book. The reader doesn’t know quite what to expect when they turn the page, and I wish more poetry books were written that way. Because to me, the appeal of surprise is its relation to curiosity, to looking outward. These poems are in a continual process of opening outward, away from the stale confines of my interior self. I’m barely present in these poems, even the ones with a first-person speaker, who isn’t even a persona so much as a multiplicity of shifting selves, bizarre imagined versions of my “self,” if there is such a thing. (OK, I really did piss on a building in Pittsburgh, but other than that....)

A word on grammar: Above I said that my poetry takes apart the English language, but I admit that I work largely within the limits of standard grammar and punctuation, rarely using sentence fragments, and no typographic experimentation to speak of. Nevertheless, I still find

endless room to explore within standard grammar restrictions. In fact I don't think of them as restrictions at all. There are some examples of fragment-based poetry that I enjoy, but generally I'm drawn more to sentences, whether they're conventionally punctuated or not.

Some may find the kind of poetry I write to be forbiddingly opaque or "inaccessible." Without letting this degenerate into a prolonged diatribe about my views on the accessibility debate, let me just say that I consider my poems to be just as readable as anything by Billy Collins (and a lot less cringeworthy). If you can read English, you can read my poems. They're not hiding anything. They're irreducible to any neat and definitive interpretation. This is good news for the reader, who can take from the poems whatever they choose to read into them. And if the poems succeed in sparking surprise and delight, they may cause certain reluctant readers to rethink the whole notion of accessibility. The last thing I want to do is pander to popular ideas of poetry that people are already comfortable with. What I want to do is to stand a little off to the side, like a furtive peddler of illicit goods on a city street, and beckon readers to come to me, saying, "Psst, come listen to this. I don't know if you're ready for it, but it's the good stuff, trust me..."

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Code of Silence

A few of you have questions
concerning communism. Let us
sit with them awhile, stroking their fur
in this failing autumn light—trees and fire hydrants
may know a thing or two about nirvana,
but where do they stand on the issues?
Customer service my ass!

This reverie has left a bruise
wide enough to cover every contingency;
ignoring their creditors, toddlers conspire in back alleys
to spread fear among the glitterati
as creatures that crawl on the earth rush to decode
the latest news from the fashion capital—
'tis the season for mooning, harpooning, making eyes
at a spread of doldrums on the credenza.
Nobody's coming to demonstrate why, however.

Please to spank the sentient meatball I am.
Is that a human sound? Biology was never my subject,
nor do I wish to press it on others, though they ask for it
tacitly as they wander
these tarnished wetlands in search of a few minutes'
respite from the office and its arias, wondering if
it's too much to ask that cloud up ahead not to pass
judgment before the jig is up, or the endless reel.

Road Trip

The sky tonight is on parole, stooped
and seditious, fresh out of college,
happy just to know us.

In a surprise twist, we're Vikings
bent on our own words
skidding surely over the waves.

Driving all night, loose-lipped
and tenebrous, the moon is pleased
beyond remembering:

“How I came to reside inside
the belly of this iron beast
I couldn't tell you, but hey,

that's the artist's life.”
From over the next hill,
a saxophone commits itself

to the waking dream whose
borders are in flux. What it costs
knows no vacancy, glowing red.

Onward, Christian Golfers

Seeds of doubt in a daisy's waiting room—
who says you can't plant 'em? I admit
I'm unfamiliar with rural customs;
tell me, is it correct to undress a soldier
through the medium of karaoke,
or is that considered gauche
for ecclesiastics of a certain age? Sure,
the grass is green enough here, greener
than promised in the catalog, but the Fermi paradox
continues to vex local landlords
and their deep-sea brethren; in the next breeze
that refuses to come along peacefully
there'll be another hungry moth to feed
who's bound to no law of God or man.

Luckily we on the yearbook committee
were reduced to tears by the whole sad affair
until we arrived at a kind of sanctuary
popularized in the uncollected yearnings
of TV chefs through the ages.
So allow me to be the first to congratulate
the odor of death in the air
whose provenance has yet to be nailed down, sucker-punched
out of its inheritance, an orphan to be envied
as philanthropy threatens to come into vogue
one last time. Better to perform our druthers elsewhere,
gentle whistlers. You never know what window may
reluctantly disclose us, or whose legacy resides
in the eye of the misnomer.

On the Green

Sixteen candles' brothers went into the army,
then I glued a leaf to the fog. It is so easy to see
a supernova curse the statue bold enough

to drink to the frail meadow in light of "I said."
The true split comes when feather traffic is
some clueless siphon of Wal-Mart voices.

That's a popular swerve for cool time to grow thieves.
Anyway, I should have tree surgery soon
in the Olympics, my holes to keep my warm

for women fixing acres on eggshells.
When they're not planting ideas of
a topless horse in winter's grave,

chirping bees devour morning almost,
bowling. On the green we never lost,
this river is just about all I can smother.

The Art of Least Resistance

I won't forget the weavers, or the boxcar melodies they relied on. Several versions of myself caught the bug and ran with it, all the way to the business end.

Belowdecks the philosophy wasn't nearly as opaque. It took teamwork to multiply anything by modern standards. And there you have it, the price of a true education. Coming down the zipline now: zoology's candid camera.

Holding one's breath under the best conditions shouldn't harry a moment to waste, but keep an eye out anyway—I put it on my credit card. That should blanket the scene in total forgiveness, even if it spends the holidays in bed. At some point, hospitality has to identify itself, or risk expulsion.

That said, it probably won't come up on the final. This seat is reserved for the west wind's mistress, after all.

Lullaby

Like spies collecting stamps
in swampy nether regions,

these days are boon companions
to mystic algorithms.

In lieu of wisdom, stars are now permitted
milk money for the duration

and Sasquatch souvenirs
are a phenomenon

whose advent has enflamed
a mass matriculation

in the light of a quasar spelling
out what we've all been thinking

as bathing beauties sign off
on news of silence, sounding.

Received Wisdom

Blazing a beeline through the stratosphere's
cryptic currency, a threadbare melody
reborn as a row of vacant houses
perched on stilts is left open to the elements
whose years are trouble enough, though quite avoidable.
No one cottons to them anymore, attuned to a more
delicate fabric in the wind's drastic measure
of the party noise leaking with feckless élan
from within restricted airspace.

Beyond this point, received wisdom needs not apply,
but what *is* the point? Who are its parents, claimants,
tax advisers? Would it rather drive a truck to work
or shake hands with destiny in Tibet? Be careful here:
the road takes a lot out of you, rolls it into a tiny ball to be
ministered to from a rocky promontory
somewhere deep in preverbal obscurity,
at which point the gods will attest
to no free lunch for the freeloading stars,
whose juice has only just now deigned to fling itself
out of the crying pan, into the crier.

Pop Quiz

A glass of water
trained in judo
mistakes a solar eclipse
for a masked intruder:

What do you do?

Tennis, No One?

That was a close shave—do you think Jesus did it
with the lights on? I guess he wouldn't need to;
after all, he is light itself! Next question.

I'd love to oblige, but isn't there enough
negativity in the world? I'd rather focus on the positives,
like moose democracy. We can always fit in

more smooches—me and the other castaways
have agreed not to sign our lives away
until the body politic has climbed aboard

the love train summarily, gracing it with
a matrix of cool calculations designed
to smoke out emerging noumena.

Too risky? Tough. That's the plan. It's what we need
to wallpaper over our aborted foray into
prehistoric tonsil hockey—it started out fun

but soon grew wings, hot wings of despair.

The Price of Vigilance

The sum total of what I don't know
about patio furniture, converted
into energy, could power a Martian colony
for one year. I know even less
about how to get out of the way
of a runaway baby carriage.
As you can see, I'm not much
use to anyone. It all started when I woke up
to find a false dawn in my Frosted Flakes.
Who put it there? I never found out,
though I have my theories.
I have long suspected foul play.

At any rate, that's my cue to get up
and take a walk into the leftovers
of a bygone epistemology; the home team
is taking the field as we speak, milking it
as only they can. It involves
a little harmless gerrymandering—

that's all I can say to offset official channels
whose monopoly on our good graces
is set to expire at the end of the Common Era
with a pizza party to wrap things up
in kid-friendly fashion, a rebuke to those
who pooh-pooh the perks of an immature style
where one is warranted, i.e., anywhere
but in well-trodden avenues of thought
where the cat can get at it. I'll take my
supreme fiction to go, please. "Where to?"

is another question altogether. The answer lingers
under the kitchen sink by way of the mudroom,
waiting for the right moment to
reveal itself. Deciding what makes a moment "right"

is, of course, the problem at the heart of dinner.
I don't expect to be treated to some
shifty-eyed pundit's commentary
on my trespass into the murk
pervading the shrubs that mark the boundary
between this world and the next,
but I wouldn't mind being taken to task
for my failure to act on the night's bravado
before I nod off here, up to my ears in paid regrets.

Wasted Hour

It's getting stuffy in here; time to punish the silverware
for dreaming too brazenly of a kind of
ahistorical redaction
where cartoons fear to tread.

The temptation to look the other way
must be more than our better angels can stand—
they're plotting something, sure enough.

Why not abscond, then, with what little we've gleaned
from crying into a lavender-scented tissue
acquired by means less than ethical?
It may be the only way to outwit
what passes for the northern lights these days.

The Fever

It's a mended temple
striving in light, it's a scar on
standard time—the fever

assigning itself to my
spotless record.
Braced against the past,

nobody owns the hum
underneath the air we
patrol for scraps of grace

the world pulled rank on.
Lacking firm instruction,
closed systems furnish

humid avenues, engage
mirages to end in traffic
pliable promises see by.

What Matters in College?

Try not to take it personally, sprawled like human cabbage
Across the naked stage of a theater robbed of history,
Someone's idea of a joke gone wrong, but I said my prayers
To the night we never spent there, eager to dance but thwarted

By banners announcing an ideological standoff
In the silence between numbers no one,
Not even the cheerful bandleader, could identify.
A bad end was in store, we could smell, and the pretentious traffic

Snaked its way down highways only the dead
Were qualified to search, new in town and ready to talk,
Though not for long; a struggle broke out for the affections
That threatened to escape one posh apartment uptown

Overlooking the perfect tragedy for tonight
The way some bachelors gather their cards in
To find out what keeps them overqualified to find
The perfect diamond over which to spread their shattered speech.

Tourist Trap

The Germans are expecting soft serve
with a weird kind of masonry
fudging the sky, so let's get upset about it
one more time.

Robert's Rules pave the way here;
sticking to surface streets,
it never hurts to punk the cosmos,
even if service is fair to poor. Another way to go

is artificial turf throughout the department
officialdom had carved in low relief,
a sample of god or goddess running
to the vanishing point, trusting it too much.

Two by two, the timeshares melt away.
Is it wrong to speak of lickerish furniture
to no one's chagrin? These floating dicta
won't moisten themselves

without a fight for the pettiest cheerleader
in the pungent annals of instinct—
accused of beauty, the horizon's
problem children pack it in.

Some Kind of Beef

Some kind of beef
blew into town
under the guise of pork
or chicken.

Go figure, but don't tarry
in the transition from oral
to written pleasure—

the hereafter waits
on myth, mystery, timely hitting.
How fitting
the ringmaster's warning:

“You've got a nice body—
don't let it shed light
on the shuttered 7-Eleven.”

Of course we slew him,
we the acquitted.

Rough Draught

I concede nothing, save for one
sidelong look at the eternal feminine
loosed upon the recreation desk.

Sunsets driven to extremes
barely make up the cost
whose bailiwick emits something

of the rough draught's last hurrah.
In time the planet may learn
punchlines paid to the germ

of Texas past. Her hair's brain
couldn't touch me here;
now it's my turn to attune.

Chased by a Gnomon

Manfully I moved about the house, asking forgiveness
of every piece of furniture, every knickknack,
every numinous artifact of a life lived posthumously.

From my kitchen window, I looked out on a pilgrim's picnic
that had seen better days. It made me wonder who
might stop by later to suspect my motives, the ones

I'd only stumbled across that morning, barely conscious
of having stirred the vacant hour to action.
Surely there was more to the story than

a set of bloody hoofprints showing the way
from yesterday's rumored falling-out with
tomorrow's slips of the tongue done up in colors

too vivid to endure, hints of which are carried in
the clandestine movement of the sun from one
corner of the room to another. Is it that late

again already? I'm afraid of what may emerge
from under my influence, inadvertently or otherwise—
something needed at the office, an open question

oblique enough to provide a decent burial
for the day as it has come down to us, on which
the evening's thinning crowds had fixed their hopes,

heedless of advice and crimes of fashion, whose loss
is the setting sun's reward, polished to a high dudgeon
shot through with speculation, the king's own composition.

Poem

A winter landscape seen
from the window of a train—
is that canonical? It has the stink
of legitimacy, at least—
in the sense that speaking to it
may induce nausea, or it may
do some good. Call me if
any of this pans out.

Night again—is it coming or going?
Terrible news either way.
I was there when the slippery slope's
calculus proved too ready
to oblige every shadow
falling into bed with
idle penmanship at sea.

Over and Out

Sorting the trash, distinguished, I slept
In thunder, wearing newish bunting.

It divided me, did the presentist burn
Socked away, a carillon's worth of

Freak accidents on parade. It saw
The trapped ape I wished I was

Who sought fame in darkened halls
Prettily. Nary a whistle paused

Upon the horizon's lips meantime,
Learning our hero's right of way.

Sidewalk's Lament

For immediate broadcast a febrile hazard to fit the glue on. Because you're every bit the seasoned interpreter, homesick with fasteners. It's a throughput concern, the damned a curtail in morning drag. Offering a white's estimation, I expect a blast and infiltration squandered. A loose exchange of views endured the book of the end. Too much cheerleader goes a brief wearing, a war on. Piles of cash in washed breath? Speak into my clone, deal my deep no. I are a lot and looked all over; the thaw was tending. Watch the bottoms roll and go. Trailing off I can't die much. If I were a devastating boy, a flung window done up in classic plastic, I'd fall to a building speaking, emerging the wanted where hell falls on time. Ex-animists control the air come near. We've wintered a plumb avenue in shorts why not. The mending after you've thirsted finds a foothold afar, a thought wobble barely glad to inch. Panic meadow coming up, hunted bundles of squirm jellied up sticky-sweet. Whatever it was the street held out, music to crumble sheer drops by came sold to sunder. Hello portable sulk and shine.

Outside Chance

Speaking as a grown barn, what else could have copped so quickly to waning light pressed into service for a song—a handsome retreat among thieves as viscous as visionary, the tune so solemn when it reaches your ear I seldom left unburied: it's all my further leaving's fault, the old tempo's weather. In neutral alleys it filled, I screamed but it never caught on. Thank god for that and further mistakes one thought about making. Rising to greet them, we fell about laughing as busted reformers looked on.

Epiphany

Ted and Linda had a problem
when the orgy they'd been planning for months
was put on hold by a global pandemic. "What'll we do
with all this guacamole?" Linda wondered aloud.
"There's enough here to feed
all the first-responder heroes."
Ted looked up from his crossword.
"Honey," he said, "you may have just answered
your own question."

Gathering Dusk

would be a good name for a horse
running for shelter from
a career that overvalues
standardized test scores.

Hey, it's only a thought experiment—
just forget it and pay attention
to this crazy shade of blue I'm cupping
in my outstretched mind.
Cities tremble under it, radiating darkness
or what passes for a thoughtful
response to same.

A smell of woodsmoke
interrogates the proceedings
with no man's permission,
amen. Seized for safekeeping,
it shapes one's factory settings
into a treasonable offense.

Yes, for a fee you can have
your own trouble picturing the year
2082, a good one for folding up
and pressing between the pages of
a favorite unread novel.

Three Scenes

I.

Anything does, or nothing goes. I feel gloved
In getting to know ulterior frontiers'
Specious cargo. Attuned to mutiny
Among the flowers' robots, my bones
Can't have escaped the need-to-know
Basis of spent breath inside a window.

II.

New clothes hardly suffice to inhibit
Daily exhortations of rooms
To chosen professions, like what
Kind of mileage do false clouds get?
They browse the heatstroke of your dream
I'm always coming to see the end of.

III.

Simple as a drain whose rim is red with endeavor
I count my busied limbs until
Gravity makes a garage of my head
Addressed to no weather—
Refuge timed out, mechanical
Issues rolling out over the land.

Spotty Legacy

Coach was giving me shit for my role in the Gunpowder Plot. I told him it was in his best interest not to emphasize my faults at the expense of the season. A championship was on the line, and who would look to its education? Certainly not the Old Testament prophets of our former acquaintance, huddled now in small groups around oil-drum fires under the Robert F. Kennedy (formerly Triborough) Bridge. Having come this far along the road to preternaturally sculpted abs, their patience is wearing thin where plagiarism is concerned. This is where the Disney Corporation has been very generous, stepping in to ensure no one is putting words into the mouth of a character who wouldn't be caught dead giving utterance to such thoughts, much less entertaining them in the first place, and for free! Indeed it has come to my attention that the cruise has already been cancelled due to anticipated shortfalls in the loofah sector. These are available for inspection at the end of the world, when my chill boss will perform some much-needed shiatsu on the question of whether and how a cloud's shadow may or may not justify its source to its own satisfaction, let alone that of a veteran fornicator known chiefly for flipping nature the bird in defiance of its vertiginous grandstanding. At some point it may become possible to separate the code from its coagulants, relieving the welkin of its clockwork burden, but if I'm left alone with my specimen collection cup, I'm outraged at my own capacity for well-wishing even when unsolicited. And that's what my tombstone will convey to every comer, whether they be friend, foe, former pope or Pittsburgh Pirate, it really doesn't matter to me. I'm what's known as a sexpert.

And before you know it, night falls on the land of confusing drink orders, settling nothing. In hot pursuit of the smile that slew suburbia, the flyover was nothing if not factitious, a superficial nod to greener postures. Gotta love those old explainers. Mostly I charm their socks off, *then* fly. Stack them over there by the darndest thing my kid just said, not this moribund carnival of distended adolescence we call a wedding of ideas. Perhaps that's too blunt an assessment; I don't like to knock on a door I haven't been invited to paint both sides of with my own heart's blood—but maybe that's a swing too far in the other direction, the one prescribed by four out of five pain fetishists who've puked a few too many into the “bushes of history,” as Marx termed it.

As he went on to demonstrate, you don't have to be civilized to invent the wheel but you do have to be horny. Not that you'll hear me complaining, despite all the shit I've got to get done today: rotate my underwear, review the report of a bird heard 'round the world, spare some time to reprimand the Golden Rule for having so many loopholes, so many “fine” distinctions whose finery has faded to a kind of mousy, haplessly obsequious earth tone not worth fighting for in polite company. Don't even get me started on the existential vertigo that sets in every time I step in the same river twice, but something tells me that ruse has long since been stripped of its

original finish. In fact, if I didn't know better, I'd say they were trying to rid the party of me, or render me post-ironic in the attempt. I suppose that's what I and my years of training get for artificially inseminating the sun's beery gaze, the brightly whining woods, the very ground I stand on, sucking.

The Widening Gyre

Bending tulips to a nudist's will
the executive itch blooms at twilight—
a clean vowel to drool the frank wind's
deluge free to wrestle.
Morganatic tears upbraid
music theory, suspend
policed volumes in steady rain
I severed. Night flees the barn
prayers hold a candle to—
home and away, a library's claws
loosen the west; attired in rage,
did baby get its qualm
a fragrance in time?
They installed a false udder
in my dorm that year, shut up
in candid observation I heaved
the sun a stout goodbye
only words could rely on. That was one
good king to get busy on, so
I took a breather for a walk—
what colors now fly barefoot
to morning's scrutiny, what's missing?
A busted Plato duly licked, tremors in time
on sale at basement prices. Baked Alaska
beguiles the moist senator—
kneecapped rumors summon the sky.

Bystander

He continued to chew
the American cheese,
dragging the skies
for common ties, a bruise.

These margins are thick
with plot and plot's
laughing impotence;
we nearly fucked in
keeping with industry—

somebody's hashtag breath
went the extra mile
in our surplus boneyard
with ketchup on the side.

I could've died, but didn't
jump at the chance to see
America on my break.

One bag looks much like another
for the heedless argonaut.

Let's turn now to the phantom
cyclone inheritor
going in for the spill.

Barbie's Alien Baby's First Botox Debacle

When pizza's on a bagel
You can do the police in different voices anytime.
That's why I'm having a craving
To be European all over America
On this the night of Barbie's puppy's birth.

In some countries they don't even let you
Hook up with celebrity dog trainers in massive debt.
"Math is hard," Barbie famously declared
After giving two pints of blood to save the life of Tojo.
I remember it because the military
Was my biggest fan that year—
I hated the military, and I paid Big Bird real money
To get them off my back.

Did Barbie leave her baby at Au Bon Pain
While getting her nose removed in Spain,
Where it is legal to do so? In a word, yes.
Seven dwarves (aliens) confirm it.

An alien killing machine with acid for blood
And 35 social media cat lady sex dolls
Provided evidence also:
"Whether you're a UFO skeptic, believer,
Or merely a rock music fan,
You get used to the numbness
That comes with Botox
And even find it soothing."

I want to quit being Barbie's alien baby
But is that even medically ethical?
Beachgoers are convinced
I'm an alien dog killer with venom known to be toxic
To man's best friend.
Only Jesus riding a puppy can say for sure.

Woolgathering

I wandered lonely as a refrigerator
paying lip service to its forebears.

Pleased with itself, the pasture looked on
where a cow or two may have been

treading lightly, considering the cost
to renew affections versus the shy

commitment of stars to planets
lacking further instructions.

Abroad, all the lost causes are hot
from the oven, ready to receive guests

out of character, oozing along nicely
now that next year's eclipse debunked me.

That brought the cops out from
refreshing their browsers, loopy with a

disarticulated wanderlust
it takes a village to misread—

prime woolgathering weather's here,
surly children tell me, entertaining

codicils they barely get the gist of,
much less have room for

on a slice of summer topped with one
vacant lot after another.

Dust

In the comfort of my home I tried to sue
for peace in my big boy pants, but the ethical vacuum
sucking me dry was holding the right words hostage
and I couldn't see my way to turning around
when I heard the dust in the room
settle down to dispel my name.

Against Nature

They're like people when you get to know them: solid,
nutrient-rich demeanors of the ancient wonder
sleep's tentacles never know, though they claim the creator's
right to dumb process, loosely faced. At the end
of the last wave the pirate guitar will stop—
the villain is admired for his tight pants.

One time I forgot to defame
Kansas in my driveway. Looters of alternate routes
should help advance the numbers game
getting naked inside of a minute you'd never surmise
until we ate it in suitable shoes on standby.
Swollen epoch for supper? Piano lesions compel
an oracle for bleeding time.

Heat Death

A fashion for heat death
More vivid than the real thing
Arrives to greet the dark
Matter washing ashore, throwing
Critical looks our way.

Its vacuity charms the delicate question
Interred beyond the shadow of
A pointed remark that rings
Sharply against the sea's
Desire to know itself;

It brings the daily bread the
Special bulletin whose sky
Entered the record like a shiv
To set the wheels in motion,
A likely story—there it goes

Bending the light into what
Our subsequent wandering
Might have resembled, one
Eldritch excursion too many
At exactly the right time.

In This House We Celebrate the Bogus Arcana

In this house we celebrate the bogus arcana
Lurking behind our shopworn soliloquies,
Rooting for hobo ethics. In a cupboard of crisis
The chairman of the owls keeps everyone honest.

Lurking behind our shopworn soliloquies,
A silence funnier than death begins to chime, but
The chairman of the owls keeps everyone honest.
When I think of going weightless for a while

A silence funnier than death begins to chime, but
Soon enough a fresh box of weather shows up.
When I think of going weightless for a while
I open the box and climb inside, a good sport.

Soon enough a fresh box of weather shows up,
And now I have two. On the second one is written
“I open the box and climb inside, a good sport”
In a hand I recognize as my own. I had one hand

And now I have two. On the second one is written
“Pay no attention to hand number one.”
In a hand I recognize as my own, I have one hand
That never lets me off the hook, ignoring my calls.

“Pay no attention to hand number one”
Is a slogan I graffiti on the walls of the city
That never lets me off the hook, ignoring my calls.
“The thrill is gone, but still begotten”

Is a slogan I graffiti on the walls of the city
When the old folks don their digital camouflage.
“The thrill is gone, but still begotten,”
They sing to the hum of traffic on the moon.

When the old folks don their digital camouflage
In this house, we celebrate the bogus arcana
They sing to the hum of traffic on the moon,
Rooting for hobo ethics in a cupboard of crisis.

Pittsburgh Haibun

Public urination has never been a habit of mine, but some years ago I had the opportunity to engage in the act in the city of Pittsburgh. It was on a layover during a bus trip from New York City to Columbus, Ohio. This layover was several hours long, in the middle of the night. After who knows how many hours on the bus, I very naturally had to use the bathroom. I could have used the bathroom in the Greyhound station, but that would have meant using the bathroom in the Greyhound station. So I decided to set off on foot, to explore Pittsburgh and to find a place to urinate. One or two bars were open, but the city was otherwise asleep. I didn't go into any bar to use the bathroom. Instead, I found a building with a recessed area set back from the sidewalk, away from the streetlights, and urinated in a dark corner. I felt comfortable doing so because that's how deserted the streets were. I thought about how I could never do this in New York, as the streets there are never totally empty of people, even in the remotest neighborhoods, even in the middle of the night. *Ah, Pittsburgh!* I thought, zipping up. On my way back to the bus station I crossed one of Pittsburgh's three rivers (the Allegheny?) on a pedestrian overpass. Coming toward me down the river was a barge—black, silent, and massive in the equally black, silent, and massive night, which happened to be the early morning hours of Thanksgiving Day. I paused in the middle of the bridge to watch the barge pass beneath me. Just before it did, it flashed a light and honked a horn at me in greeting. I waved in response, glad that I had foregone the bus station bathroom in favor of public urination, without which I might have missed out on this romantic late-night encounter with a barge.

Distance traveled
for the sake of happy reunion—
light from a dead star

Cake vs. Beer

I was thinking of having a beer.
Then I remembered there was cake.
The choice came down to cake vs. beer.

Turning my head ninety degrees to the left,
I saw through the window a civilization
wafting slowly down through the trees.

Was there a ballgame on? I decided to see.
Antiques Roadshow was on. Close enough.
I drew the curtains so I could focus.

The cake was German chocolate.
The beer was merely German.
Either way, a storm of steel.

What was I waiting for? A sigh from above?
A babe in a graveyard? A tip on a horse
whose parentage puts the moon's to shame?

Funny how people look up at the stars
and call it the "night sky," as if night
really took place up there, waiting

for all the facts to come in, and the dust
of unsold centuries to settle
on a plan of action that will never come.

Tiffany vase. Mission highboy.
Civil War cufflinks.
The choice came down to cake vs. beer.

Supine Trilogy

I.

Lying in the bath, candles all around,
I was reading *Fanny Hill*
when the phone rang.

It was my attorney, Frank.
“Do you have a minute?” he asked.
“Sure,” I said. I could hardly claim otherwise.

“Listen carefully,” he said,
and proceeded to recite “The Snow Man”
by Wallace Stevens.

“Thank you,” I said, “that was nicely done.”
I hung up the phone, lay back
and considered a career in insurance.

II.

Lt. Cmdr. Rosaria della Francesca
lay in her rack aboard the U.S.S. *Florida*,
a ballistic missile submarine
of the *Ohio* class, displacing
18,750 tons submerged, carrying
24 Trident II missiles, patrolling
the South China Sea.

She couldn't sleep. She was one word away
from finishing the *New York Times*
Sunday Crossword. She needed
a seven-letter word for
“ornate tea vessel.”

III.

In the desert near Las Vegas, a bank president
from Wilmington, Delaware lay flat on his back, dead
under the burning midday sun, naked as a plucked flamingo,
as a disgraced magician, as a lounge act gone sour,
as the version of himself he'd sought in life
but never attained till now.

Career Development

I never want to buy a house
nor argue with my favorite spouse
when I spill ketchup on her blouse
but if a famous cartoon mouse

should offer me a job in data analytics
I don't believe I'd refuse to at least consider the idea,
weighing the pros and cons
from the deck of my imaginary yacht
moored in the shadow of Shakespeare himself,
who knew all about the whims of chance
and its uncouth sister, market instability.

The sun, meanwhile, looks about ready to pop,
and a very large crow keeps tabs on me.
That's how I know I'm loved.

Vital Sign

There it goes again, peace of mind outpaced
by wiggle room in the offing.

A holiday mood prevails
in tragic arbors, in off-brand scriptoria.

Please point me to the crudités
titans of industry recommend.

Remember the antique bomber
on the courthouse lawn? It's like that,

but stripped of pagan inducements
to sitting out one's conscience

spilling into the next newsworthy
demolition. I'd like to see them try me,

the army of tardy atoms making me whole—
I'd like it all to hell, a forever ringing bell.

The Red Ball

See the red ball
Fly through the blue
Air. It is a small ball,
Not a big ball,
That much we know.
To really see the ball,
One must be the ball
And play it cool.
To do so is cool
And imbues the ball
With a spirit of play
Bigger than play.

What it means to play
Is beyond the ball
To ponder, to play
Over in a mind of play.
Only the big blue
Yonder may make a play
For the truth about play.
What there is to know
Is not for us to know
But for us to play
Until we're cool
With being cool

Or not cool.
Those who play
Exist—how cool
Is that? Very cool.
Where has the ball
Gone to now? The cool
Breeze has lost its cool.
The good old blue
We knew is a new blue
Now, not so cool.

So? We still don't know
What colors know.

Well, what do you know—
Suddenly we're cool
Now that we know
How little we know
And how to play
For what we do know
Or did know
But forgot. Remember the ball?
Has anyone seen the ball?
It's so hard to know
Anything at all! Blue
Am I now, blue

Do I go in search of blue,
The one I once did know
As the true blue,
Platonic blue,
Before it was cool
To talk of blue,
To go mad for blue
As if acting in a play
In which you play
A character in love with blue.
But what of the red ball?
I fear the red ball

Is a gone ball.
No longer may we play
With it. In the cool
Of the evening we know
Whereof speaks blue.

Wall

All these years
having gone untried,

slowly the bricks
deigned to fade

into a pain-free
zone of ill use

replete with mere
seconds to spare—

Lucky Lacunae

If the weather on the fringe of understanding
Took a notion to pardon a guy for drawing breath,
Trying times ought to try a little harder
If a full accounting is to be made without
Adult supervision, thereby breeding
Trust in strange new quarters
Where summer stops in for a breather before
Sliding into the shapeless promise of
The proverbial trial period, which has come and gone
Already, eager to avail itself of the lucky lacunae
Creeping about just out of reach
In a far corner of the locked-up library just
When they were about to reveal themselves, stuck between
Ambassadors of hope on the one hand and
Nervous executioners on the other.
All sought to enfold the most exotic intervals
Into a “new old” song of insistent longing
Draped across the quotient that results
From the division of communal effort into
A far more workable series of
Furtive glances at the infinite refracted
Through every untraced hour under the sun.

It Came from Across the Lawn

You can see it before it arrives
in earnest—more space than we know
what to do with. Light fills it
with ideas of infinity
no sane investor would abide;
the effect is similar to drowning
in the sweet refrain of a child's
interview with a cloud—
putting a hand in, she finds it alive,
and the stage is set for a showdown.

In practical terms, this means
learning to vary one's poses
so that the light will not
strike out on its own, having prepared
not so much as a bindle to hide away in
when the scenery rolls to a halt.

If the reckless landscape doesn't object,
I've elected to see it through
a guess too hazardous for mere language
to compensate for. This is the last
attempt at peace the day will depose
if I have anything to say.

Graduation Day

In the vague series of hotel lobbies
following the fall of man, the new wine
mingled with star charts to amplify
a gratuitous music blowing itself blue
to some avail. The effect was to divide
the class into two separate yet equally
benighted fan clubs, pending litigation.

A sweatshop choir intervened then,
scoring one for the mall rats among us.
We rented, like, a car, and slept in that car
until you couldn't tell it apart from
its children anymore. Egging us on,
the principal shamed us
into begging his question; that was easy
to ignore but far from lucrative, like moss
finding love on the wrong side of the law.

The Last Resort

“Beginner’s luck,” begged the question. A curse was
the nude pilot. Sandwiches’ damp machinery
fooled the eye. I’ll say it again:
frantic in the dawn’s boats the sea’s daughter
fruit salad memo. Interns were in the bay.

Something some dog thought threw down light
where new paint piled up
reconnoitering massed clouds’
standard fill-up. The wash came out in the blinding
the fish undertook, the spirit of the age.

Years knew us biblically—if I said you had a phlegmatic canary
would you sing “Auld Lang Syne” to it
forgetfully? Knock knock, it’s bottomless
time. My lord has moved his money. Sit on it
or sweat it out. Don’t dunk it.

Flashing Scents

Blood feuds fetched
slalom abusers in the
background a bruised
toothbrush took over,
fading into a taxi
sunset dividends expire
wrestling; the knife worried
peeling bells above
municipal course ethics.

Sea figures go all the way
for muted lightning
all of a piece on the piano
stuck in sand. That's the way
she wets a bench
furtive in jacket weather
stolen from curfew.
Lights off, red walls
fart in confidence,
a Thanksgiving miracle.

Crowds uncover
flashing scents'
botanical overdrive, as sure
a bet as toast is
damnation flower.
A supple church odor
enhanced the whole
in the partial outlook,
cruciform appendix
on the flooded epilogue
nobody filed out of court
in the pissing rain.

By the Way

What was I slinking off to correct in the chimes,
totally blasé about my new digs? And furthermore

we find satisfaction behind the smallest
sips of sullied flesh fresh from the printer.

Another speaker stands up to offer dissent and
warmest wishes from a league or two in the offing

soon to be shouted down mid-sermon by a new
ombudsman on the bridge. It's never the quiet ones

whose dreams get plastered at the drop of a wink,
tending to concerns that used to be a hat, and that

may have been the end of work for once and all—
my work, anyway, as acting inspector of a stunning

conclusion to our broadcast day. Cue the mad birdie
crooning the devil's interval on repeat until we

decide enough isn't enough, is merely a tangent
off on which new notions of what's doable go.

Roots

Today choosing
and perfect
actual. Longer fast
endlessly face.

Cicadas up, harness
torn. All the think
follows. Here of
at free we
appeared. Fruit you
disinterred not again.

Swarm face with
where under
where here's close.

Love Song

It's good to know things and make use of them,
If only for the sideshow antics they endure
In your exalted favor, your full and hummable name.

Off-topic at last, we can drink now
To the shedding of a few final curt reminders
That shovels and picks may dig a fine ditch

But will never take the place of brain power,
Sheer in its music, singular to touch or be touched by
The way you held me that long-ago deluge;

It should have sufficed for a second home, a gesture
Too good not to smother. The moon sailed over
At last call, when trees knew our place and animals

Drafted us into a tell-all we hadn't pre-ordered
But consumed with relish anyway. As you took the glass
From my hand, I knew you hadn't even begun.

Caution Tape

On TV they made it look easy—
coins in a fountain dreaming
stellar death into being.
Next stop: vespers gone wild.
Shoes on, I went off, gently chewing
nothing to see here. I couldn't be
more strapped to a gurney
wheeled off the edge of the world.

Pigeon central salutes you,
stupor induced by going rogue—
I heard of a free ride to stir
old news by, dented visions
crawling home to rot.
But the dance was derailed, insufficient
to break the surface tension of an email.

Missing the point—to their credit—
the hounds of hell looked thoughtful.

Nothing but Pure Intentions

There's no emotion anymore, only a makeshift duality
Angels are called to plead for. The original flew away,
Dissolving in light like a pack of novices engaged
In a spirited round of Rate My Confessor.

They need to do the infrastructure better—
Gremlins getting high in hospital corners
Deny the blackest night its claim to fame, and hungry crows
Elect a disqualified sunrise: it was their cherished ambition

To get the angels back. Kittenish bromides
Are the cure the prize committee sent along instead,
Maddening the monuments in their wake.
In a fit of pique, these ancient mounds

Backlit by rage do a service to all who gaze on them,
But I can see room for improvement. That's why
I'm dining alone at Wendy's with lions rampant.
But are they rampant enough?

Schleppers Awake

It's really too funny how we tunneled
Our way into a stewardship of the senses
Turning out fully demotic for now.

Then it passed that the unblessed chugged
Whole valleys free of natural light
Before closing time. That way we divided

Our plenty into crumbs of swag
Small enough to simulate further reading
Without a lull in the designated time slot.

You don't have to tell me the tides
Could take a lesson here, or at least a letter
It would be futile to hide in the folds of

Excess baggage clearing the fence
At just about dawn, that turgid ceremony
Lapping us before we've left the gate.

Enchanted Errand

A paper sunbeam's cry
skids to a halt, bad intimation of
sweepstakes to come. Out of this
old material a new
customary greeting takes on
the viability of evening.
Wait here a minute—

there's no getting around it now, or very little,
maybe enough for love doctors
cavorting in the field; its dimensions
objectify the ideal partner
to fish for compliments with, losing speed
in or out of season, rain or shine.
But that's the word I took you for,
small wonder.

Yes, I live for the aura
a passing cloud promotes, the one I've nicknamed
Fat Tony, just to fit in, and it gets me every time
today becomes an immersive sojourn
in wasted space, a long way from ruin.

Vocation Home

Stopping here for the night
to heed a few calls, to arrive whole
a plain deal sooner than
a worthwhile looking after—
it's enough to shore up the shadow
lukewarm assessments cast along
a hidden track turned open road.

I'm shy that way if not debriefed
by landfall—it's how to know of
the night's tools at all, tuned
to a frequency snagged on
an elemental refuge barely
contained in the next mistake
the chastened sky may scold.

Traveling Light

Like a prism throwing shade on
unauthorized flora, nuclear brunch
wants its baby out of hock.

Guess I'd better remand my tongue
to protective custody
should the captain prove too frank,
mourning youth, or otherwise
reluctant to land—

the littoral is getting mugged
prematurely, a smoky scent of neglect
rented out for parties and
entropic patrimony.

In the mood for analgesics,
it's like the sexy exoplanet said:
when in Rome, don't throw your trash
all over Rome.

Home and Harem

Her boudoir went belly-up, wanting only an excuse
To sack a certain bedazzlement in the armature
Of sudden death. It was tantamount to storytelling
Of the worst kind, sickly from birth, and not one

To tickle a superstition into tomorrow. Plenty of ghosts
Have entered the chat to shop their screenplays around,
Not fooling anyone, or if they do, promptly regretting it,
Ill placed to sit in judgment on any sui generis

Harbinger of studs awaking. Into the furnace for you, then,
Demoted spectacle, your society is no longer
A corollary to bogus tracts on topics ranging from
Zen gardening to lucid dreaming in thirty days.

Telltale signs of collapse earned a gold star
From these undead testimonials; I had an inkling they
Might come in handy down the line, a surefire way
To alienate a too loud dream getting loose.

On the Lookout

A fresh eye takes to the air, turning to dust
for a kind word to live through.

What else can the day afford? It's calving nicely,
intrepid to the end. I can steel you for a second

if that's the reputed boob inspector
knocking now; we can pretend to a greater cause,

a bigger fruit to chew. In a few more
years or minutes, all this fretful loitering

may spur the sun to break its silence anyway,
wheeling through the seasons in a ploy

to get its point across, driving the very myths
that used to know our number to distraction

in the paling comparisons we help ourselves to.
In this there's a note of quiet strangulation

keeping the flame from calling us home,
our show's impending cancellation.

The Big One

Left untreated, an ordinary day in America
can balloon into a gastronomic donnybrook
no one asked for. It can be hard to find
a place to stand between the balls
flying around all innocent.

It helps to be a born debater
pickled in the briny light of a birthright's
aptitude for decay,

but I can't speak to that. What I *can* do
on this too blue afternoon
is refer you to a breeze emeritus
blowing too many failed login attempts
out of the water (just don't drink the stuff).

And the scent of weeds that grow
like well-adjusted children
along these orphaned sidewalks
is sweeter than what it wakes up to.

That should get us through the night,
if the night even bothers to show.
You never know.

Now I should really get back to my game.
They tell me it might be the big one.

Works and Despair

Anyone could see it purling—a stone's breath
Worth too much biddable sky to contend with
Imparting a sleazy aura, ready to scramble its jets
Out of nowhere, making the most of a failed state—

But few had the knowhow to redeem it. It wasn't easy
To smooth over summer's dereliction of duty
For the sake of bemused pupils' botched foreplay,
But they heard that abdication was a finer option

And took this more literally than future legislators
Could have foreseen. I can smell the smoke from here,
Bigshot that I claim to be, unknown in my time
From which I venture forth only rarely, hungry for

A month of Sundays to strip for parts and other
Forms of fellowship to render into a fuel
That doesn't simply absorb its own output
But makes up time for those who would pour

Buckets of the stuff into the question of what to do
If we're no longer singing along to the blues
We've yet to see the charred interiors of,
Much less thanked for all they've done for us.

Cloud Pleaser

Above all, a sea of cyclic inquiry claps its hands. These apples won't apply themselves and that's their windfall. Excuse me into a new caboose just the same, bound for a fruitless plane. I just got back from my Babylonian captivity and boy are my psalms expired. So for once I opted into a surgery I couldn't bear to be civil to; it helps to be born a statistic but it's not a requirement. You can always become one later, after this little piggy's orbit decays into a rune more conducive to change or its haptic equivalent. Then the businessman said a sentence that made me betray my face to all seasons. At the same time I struggle to give birth to beautiful flowers, and the famous restaurants are marching down the mountain.

Below stairs the upshot is on duty, tasting the edge of an eaglet's testimony, but nothing beats it for sparking creativity: my erotica/fetish stories are drenched in graphic sexual description, offering extreme arousal and entertainment to broad-minded individuals and couples. Meanwhile the streets are overflowing with news of our lieder's capitulation. Someone must have tiptoed into history's brazier when the fire went out for a drink and never came back. I frequently tell a story in this connection of what happened to me a number of years ago:

A highly sexed woman friend called me up at midnight and said, "If you rely on the Taoist arts to have a child, it will be virtuous, good, and long-lived. If that doesn't pan out you can find me chewing cud with camels in my bid to unhorse the latitudes I grow away from. What brought me to this pass is a trade secret, hard to come by unless you're handcuffed to the wind, intimate with its many bastard children, though to put too fine a point on it is to exceed postcoital expectations. Soon enough some pallbearers will be along to hack it in primetime anyhow. No two sweat stains are alike, they say, though now it's getting darker earlier, we need to be on the lookout for bargaining chaps whose chilly antecedents give us leave to slack off at the moment when bitter contumely is called for. To take but one example, this afternoon I planned to take sweet revenge on Derek, the dirty old man next door, who had ogled my hot young body one time too many, but the best part of my job as a writer forbids it, forces me to stalk the moors disguised as a journeyman brainiac offering discounts on liturgical services delivered in whatever fictive dialect strikes your fancy."

This boy's blizzard holds promise, but we'll have to come back when politics is less of a dealbreaker than currently. Let's order some cheap wine and wash it down with expensive porn, the kind the astronauts use. Thank you for flying Cunnilingus Air, never a dull moment in the life of a scholar—when I left school, I got various jobs in Montreal but visions of Queens and Rooks and Knights and Bishops kept floating into my head and interfered with my work. Death will send you the video and see what's up. But I still want to know what we're doing *after* the

party. I was thinking we might beware the uncanny in a cow's mien in our move to abandon certain articles of faith best left unpublished. Chewed over by a battery of seasoned industrial spies, we were scouts for the bigger outfits until the hammer flew out of the boss's hand into the fertile crescent at our feet, and poof—come spring a truckload of damsels found their way into our mist, which was nearly comfy enough to assuage their furry friends' reticent approach to haggling for old saws sturdy enough to withstand glances exchanged for gravity when nothing else would cure the undercurrent of anxiety that's always slipping and falling on the freshly waxed floors of our awakening.

But it seems we're looking at a blip in today's usability rating. It's as if being told to brace for impact was only the latest in a series of heart-shaped emoluments come sliding down the oil' gullet way past our bedtime. I can't say why this bothers me, so I hope this will be the end of it, or at least the end of *something*. I was shocked: a German shepherd knocked down my shock and opened the door of the bag and nothing happened. It reminded me of the mission of the car thieves; their eyes are sad they don't know how to bathe. To which the oncoming semi replies, "Be grateful!!! Be tormented!!! The chicken is touching the elephant. He wants everyone to know he can ride a motorcycle but his brain is not in class yet. It's a lesson in karma: the beauty of spreading the harvest will precede you into the grave if you want to kick the car, to walk without fighting a watermelon. That's the boss car, not the lust of the devil—since dawn I have watched the video over and over, but am not yet satisfied. I'm forced to taste the benefits of a degree in getting laid beneath the Bodhi Tree." Afraid to pee, I want to laugh.

Use your knees to think about the delicacy of blasphemy; it will prove itself a friend to a heart more than a car because it rotates. Sooner or later it feels good to hear of an opening taking shape before one's eyes have a chance to adjust the claims an average day's habitation among brick-and-mortar branches broken off in the last storm make on a person. The route I want isn't the famous one from the song, but the one the tall young athletic blonde of my fantasies observed eloping with unchecked democracy. It hurts only once, then forever: distracted by bees acquitted of treason, the pyramid scheme up and left, true to its nature in grokking an empire's belated marriage to a fault, for which it failed to blame irrelevant parties before the internet came along to spirit away any notion of escape that didn't nurture at its core a belief in a grief so chic it might be mistaken for a half-baked ode to suing the daylight out of the firmament whose roots are in theory. In my own case, I have found that squatting in the bathroom, taking a shower, and jerking off in bed can spell doom for the uninitiated, not to mention any hidden fees that may accrue.

Stepping up to the lectern, I'm crazy for craftsmanship from the comfort of my bed. I'm not going to say it's redemptive; even if I put my head out with my feet, the tricolor can hold my hair. In the meantime I'm eating in the field. People who are so fussy about this kind of thing

seem to be looking for a wife and having a hard time, but standing in a field other than a lake could be dangerous. I've been here before. How are you, captain of the castle gate at the river gate? Please perform your song in front of the funeral hall. Thank you for putting my name in the song. I would like to contact you in your absence. These are the cheap seats, but I like the terrible outlook. It's not shame that prevents me from partaking of the solstice, it's my late swing at some high heat that sends the season packing. No doubt it's been tried before in less litigious corners of society, but the cosmic drone was audibly worried as it emerged from the dealership whence it all fell apart, superficially unscathed. I would expect a timeless tale of unrequited sloth to compensate for the loss, but I wouldn't put money on its willingness to stay the night when that night is wanted in several states.

Sure enough, it's the non-sexy stuff that has to get better. A suitcase full of odd moments would seem to agree, however gray its area of expertise—in my creditor's house are many abattoirs, and the chance to see France naked is still outstanding. It's boiled fate, or the echo of. Midway barkers know it well, hurting for our custom. Neon cowboys shoot the breeze with unreconstructed coeds, and the line for concessions is short as it'll ever be. Oh what a beautiful hot dog.

Notes

The first sentence in “Bystander” is taken from *The Death of Jim Loney* by James Welch.

“Nothing but Pure Intentions” incorporates quotes from former LA Angels manager Joe Maddon.

“Roots” is composed of the first word from every line in “Tree” by Jorie Graham.