THE AMNESIAC AND THE ANEMONE

BY

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I am closer to you
Than land and I am in a stranger ocean
Than I wished

—Barbara Guest

It is true that each self keeps a secret self which cannot speak when spoken to.

— Lucie Brock-Broido
LINES WRITTEN ON A DROP OF MILK

Call me poise, call me carriage, call me from the inside of an empty jar—

call me what you want,
but when you do, gather me little

by little: I will rest in the cup
of your clavicle or on the tips

of ten fingers; I will land on a tongue
and wander your body’s blue note,

the dense marrow or brittle bone—
but if you wring me from your skin, say

I am the thing that falls; call me
a fallen thing and I will go bad,

down the sink’s throat; I will
curdle and cloud, go from whole

to evaporate, and then, like that,
to powder—I will go down

and land in the white umbrella
that falls when I fall, will be

a thousand letters in a jar,
the mailbox full of snow.
POEM FOR A GIRL GONE MISSING

Daughter of summer, girl who makes things glow—
the year honey bees littered the yard,

you were a seed. Now, years later,
it’s your face on the carton, smiling

when I pour the milk. You wanted to be
pure metal. You wanted to be divine,

blooded with ichor, beholden to no one.
This year we traced your smile to Hollywood,

but they pressed you the way an olive
is pressed for oil. Now you’re liquid cinema.

A bee in your ear, I tried to tell you—
but your absence is a riddle scratching

its hundred heads. This year,
there were no butterflies. Strawberries

should be growing, but spring is gone
and so is your dazzle, your slow burn and quick

yellow hair. What will happen come June?
Your brain is a box of arsenal,

and you are what becomes of an asteroid:
torch and zag, see-saw sway.
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.
The Photo Shoot

I am told to sidle up
to a tree; I ask its limbs
to surround my own
with leaves. There is a clothing there
is a clothing. Under a canopy of lenses
I subvert myself. I am almost
invisible. If my eyes dilated,
they would be two acorns.

There is something
about the veins and pores of flora
that my body responds to
by becoming unseen, becoming
too small to see; what’s left
are a few bobby pins
and one clavicle. It might be
another body’s branch.

The thing that’s difficult
is the timing of it all. Knowing
when to breathe. Knowing when
to do anything, to ask for water,
for a robe or a mirror, to ask for a mirror.
To ask for proof of the shot,
of the shoot that emerged
years after my body left.
**She Gets Very Close to the Mirror**

A little too near the eye: a little
too near, but from it I take
sunspots, nerve endings,
tiny rooms of quiet. Through
an electric tunnel, train cars
cross noiselessly; they carry
nobody home. What’s there
is not found under the lid
or in the corner of a closed
sleep, but along the lining
of an ear: when I get close,
I’m a noise, stepping on bulbs
and crushing glass. In your eye,
summer is a damselfly
in one of my bones. The green
lacewing sings through the lens.
SHE SEEMED TO ARRIVE SLOWLY

For hours I pulled toward you, sea star—

I was a traveling pause, I went
deliberately across that dark floor.

The sand created clouds of my lungs.
Taking pleasure in holding zero,

my hands stirred the water and made
ornaments of oyster shells.

To charm your five fingers,
I unrolled a fog from my ear—

a long signature to know me by,
a dim and dissolving sugar. Star,

you are the evening that’s easy to keep near.
SONETTO

Think of the thing that dislocates your ear,
then imagine how the ear is recovered. The blast

and cure, what detonates and mends; and then,
how to restring the instrument. Here the gondoliers

have no need for us, they sing into their own canals
and navigate the city without sinking. Sound

is a form of energy that moves through air and water;
its waves of pressure collect in us. What you want

is char without fuel, sonetto, a little song to fill the jar;
you want shaken bottles and sudden explosions.

What I want is your flammable mouth, its cinematic
mottle and cue. We agree to disagree. Gondolier,

navigate the city without poles. Let the little song
and its echo fly through your unfastened ear.
SAINT VERONICA HAS SOMETHING TO SAY (I)

El Greco, “Saint Veronica with the Holy Shroud,” c. 1580

Where Eastern skies diminish, and where the Dead Sea swallow circles the pines, heretics map the blue and prophesy.

They tell us about constellations, about floods and invasions, about what will be written and why. We’re told Keep quiet,

but pray for rains to fall. So, raising a cloth to my lips, I say nothing; I prevent expression from being seen.

But inside, a tiny whale survives—a tiny whale in the mouth of a woman—and between two seas, the poor walk backwards and forwards. Beggars gather fallen olives, and madwomen keep bees in their hands; they whisper into books when stung. Dear illegitimates, I resemble you. Like a veil hiding nothing, we wail wide. We wait for the fruit in our open mouths. But the city empties out, and a swallow beats away with my heart. Imagine me as I imagine you: as figures walking back into the book, becoming visible. Imagine the beached fish returned to sea, the broken wrist repaired. Imagine a word stitched to nothing then spoken. A word like a bee held tightly, then let go.
THE WOLVES ARE SLEEPING, BUT I’M NOT TIRED

Failing in a nighttime way, I pinned the dark to a tree.

I fell in love with an unfinished sentence,
I only wanted things that kept moving:

the oceans’ clear currency, more Alaskan ephemera.

Dear Windsailor, the dark I held down was for you;
the shaded moss, a love letter on a leaf.

But my ear has a cloud in it. Too much water

occupies the space between us. While the sea’s blue money
changes hands, place a glass against the hull

and listen for the air breathing. Let the fish

off the line, the phone off the hook,
and waltz me down to the floor. I’ll burrow and doze

in your ear, be the dilated tone in your mouth.

You’re the needle that solves the stitch and makes the vinyl
hum. You’re the sentence I keep wanting to unfinish.
ON SYMMETRY

Air has no twin: along the sill a film forms,
the window warps: a world translated twice
in glass, then gone when the pane
cLOUDS over. Without its replica, a thing
flails, but adjusts to disparity:
in utero, the vanishing twin vanishing
into clear currency, an ocean swallowed by a sea,
and in a blink, the coeval self reimagined
as simply self. When pain clouds the eye,
you see disruption not in a mirror
but as a word—a crab inscription,
a walking between saw and was.
STILL LIFE WITH WOMAN AND VERNAL EQUINOX

The branch inside your wrist is dim today. While onion skin curls in the kitchen, while the shade of your hair grows gray,

you’re memorizing the parts of a violin: scroll, and bridge, and button. The pieces frame the song—like the afternoon rain, thin-

run along the barn roof, gives a name to the mist that rises from the weathered form. The season and its long wane,

how long it takes for things to gather or go. Though some time Spring will scrawl its vines along your walls, what is severed,

then gone? A summer, then the long fall to fall. I’m searching your pulse for snow, for the ruin of a violin, its unraveled scroll and bridge broken. Outside, an absence of crows; you’re sailing toward another winter day. The parlor ivy grows toward the window.
**INSOMNIAC’S NOCTURNE**

When night begins to arrive,
the tiniest joint in the body softens:

delicate as a cuticle, orchid,
or acute as a minute of migraine,

the ear inside your ear
listens for things that adjust
to dimness, that give advice
on how to read them: for sleep,

a tongue’s worth of sugar.
Always the milk warm. Lunula

when you need a place to doze,
the moon coming to rest

on a fingernail; then the hazelnut
and its collapsible husks.

And when you want
to be looked after,

when the tangible wire to waking
is severed and nothing is left,

I will be the river, spliced
into three kinds of leaving:
stilled tongue, lip of glass,
the sleeping water sent away.
GHOST LIMB

At night,
the marrow chirps: a woodpecker
descends: the tendons
twitch. Tickle, scythe, phantom-itch.

Bone gone, the memory is limbed
for years,
root weight without the flesh.
In the small hours
I call out:

Bird, loosen your beak from my knee.
ONE OF MANY INCARNATIONS OF A TREE

The copse of aspens
    near the stone-built chapel

has come undone.
    A yellow flock,
    the leaves

leave each other:

the trees turn, and
    it is winter.
    The trees turn

the white unwritten page of winter:

a thing’s body
    and a thing’s shadow
    on a hill—

an arrow
of snow geese,

    but never two

bodies at once—
STILL LIFE WITH DETRITUS IN APRIL

The weather here consists of light and the interruption of light. I want to follow the pages of a tree, but there’s a chink

in the narrative: every cloud passes erratically, and for minutes at a time, nothing appears in color. You write from Big Sky country:

Here, the night is famous before it falls. You’re building a garden, starting with what’s necessary; planting bulbs beneath the dirt,

each tulip carefully aligned. Here, every tree is dry and hangs wild. Branches battle with plastic grocery bags, fluttering

like trashy ornaments in the wrong season. Your bulbs are nicking the skin of the earth, barreling through the sod;

you’ve built a terrarium for every tulip. I’m cultivating my garden of bottle caps; down the street, there’s a rumor of cocaine. My face,

ambiguously reflected in a shovel, remembers the last dream you had before you left: a house with a doorway, but no door.
DOMESTIC STUDY

The house is a curator
of questions, it contains closets
full of board games
In attic-light, in door-light
she unfolds his notes, opens all
the clothing he folded
She empties the cupboards
of dishes she fills
the cupboards with dust
In bed she is a sentence
he mispronounces
In bed she pulls an orchestra
out of his mouth
then a pill box full of recipes
for last night’s headache, rest
a magnet on the temple
or sip from a bottle of
maple syrup
At midnight she builds a room
of spoons she plants a field
of dishes and salt water
To soothe a toothache

place a whole clove between
the jaw and the cheek

Milk for a minor burn
In spoon-light, in button-light

a pear turns soft
in its bag

a snow globe unlocks from
its wooden foot

some glitter goes missing
the carpets sparkle for a hundred years
After we felled the Noble fir, you washed the sap from my hands. In the sink, the soap and the sap and a nest, a bed of needles. You read my future in their pattern: You will this. You will that. It will be this way. True, all of this happened: a pair of hands in the mirror, a gathering of dark matter. You traced the lines of pine in the white basin and we left the tree outside, a cut thing.

We axed the tree and left it overnight. In the morning, its branches were traced with the evening’s weather, each needle made clear by the frost that encased it. In this way I can approach any past: shake the snow from the limbs, bring the body inside.

Somewhere further north, elk wander into the next season and pine needles succumb to wind, collecting along the banks of the river. A different kind of departure: a man who locks eyes with a woman in a mirror and will not look away, or the movement through town of a hearse with no body inside.
THEN YOU

(1)
The sky grew bees, the clouds spilled a kind of honey.
I let myself be close to your mouth.

In the backyard, rye grass made
a small pillow for our sleep; the apple bucket
filled on its own, and snap peas offered me sugar.
There were bells where there weren’t bells before.

I tucked a lock of hair behind your ear.
What I mean is, there are ways to avoid speaking.

(2)
What used to be a cloud curled up in the sky
and spread to our house. Where the sun
should have been, the moon like a sling;
by the door, a bucket of wasps. Left alone

and without your sound, I hear doorbells ringing
in cartilage, then my ears repairing themselves.

(3)
This room is where a famine forms
and apples no longer appear.

You ate me, mouth.
There are strands of my hair in your teeth now,

and twenty hungers in this small bed.
Have you asked yourself what you want
to undergo? This room is where a famine forms,
and you are that famine.
[Sun-down, sky repeating blackbirds]

Sun-down, sky repeating blackbirds. The leaves of the smoke tree are plum-dark, each branch is a stiletto of exhaust. This land is charged with my kind of weather; electricity as wide as August, as far as Oklahoma. Wasps quarrel above thatches of scotch broom, and I am caught staring at the sun: the locked eye dreams of blaze. I am dreaming of a cabinet of black-eyed Susans blooming in a burned-out house.

Then, out of nothing, an ear—and in the garden, a bird dismembered, wings subtracted from the body that bore them, its feathers an ash-heap in the process of disappearing—the plume of the plume, the sun avalanching, even the scotch broom scorched—whoever said beauty was an undamaged thing?
LINES WRITTEN ON A GRAIN OF RICE

If I am carried by fork to the tongue,
I will be carried by tongue to the throat.

Your swallow will single me out:
I'll wait in a pocket of spittle, then fold

into your windpipe's wall. If you cough,
I might multiply; growing there,

I'm the thing that makes you guttural.
The tiniest microscope will reveal

I've embedded myself: a fuzzy burr,
the bit you can't swallow. Surgeons

can repair the heart through the wrist
and through the mouth remove

a kidney, but can they unfasten
the grain from your voice? I'd like

to stay, a sprouting tattoo asleep
in a house I could care for. Inside

your cough, a million coughs,
and me, a seed inside a smaller door.
SAINT VERONICA HAS SOMETHING TO SAY (II)

We speak of killing a trout with a rod. It is the effort made by the trout that kills it. —Ernest Hemingway

If what I tell you is true, the pain inside your jaw will not abate. The absorber and the absorbed become one.

Caught in a quarantine, the jaw says to the hurt
You’re my voice now. It has learned the art of ventriloquism,

the art of making another mouth move.
But come close, I have something to tell you:

the caught fish can unhook its jaw
and reenter the water. If what I say is true,

knives sharpen themselves and wait for meat.
Ice can thaw from the inside out.
DISAMBIGUATION: ON DESIRE

For arrest, see Cardiac or Crime. For the place you’ll be taken to, the little place of forgetting, see Oubliette.

See Migraine for a world that weighs inside the brain and Bulldozer for a sleep that stays awake.

Hope, or half the bird’s bone, is what you’ll get when you arrive at Wish (for the science of hidden message, see Stenography), and if wishing doesn’t work, try the ancient form of night prayer (Nocturne).

For downpour, see the bin full of Broken Umbrellas; the wide sky that protects you, Rainshade or Shadow; that which makes of your body a bull’s eye, Fusillade. As a last resort, see the one who knows how to make iron move (Locksmith).

When you’re tired of turning pages, he’ll tell you love is a Taiwanese river, an empty seat in Oklahoma, one of several names for zero. See Heart, see Cardiac, see Arrest.
II.
POEM WITH HER BACK AGAINST THE WALL
LIZZIE BORDEN, 1860-1927.

The death of Sarah Anthony Morse Borden, 1863.

From the corner of sleep,
    a tendril emerged; Mother
    is watching me sleep on a Sunday.

She drops her braid
    across my bed, then drifts along
    the wall. In my dream she drifts

into a box, lies down
    and crosses her hands
    at the wrist. I wake up and

it’s true, and Father
    is saying a hemorrhage is a tendril
    gone bad. The blood wouldn’t stop pooling.

The space you’ve left
    is enormous; Father filled
    the space with dirt. The blood

took you, Mother;
    I was robbed of your figure
    when we buried the braid.
The marriage of Andrew Jackson Borden to Abby Durfee Gray, January 1865.

Mother—

once I watched you
cup an egg so tightly;
you opened your hands

and there it was, intact,
though your knuckles
were white from the pressure,

the delicacy of the force
mounting inside the yolk.
Its shell should have imploded

but didn’t. You said
An egg can only be broken one way;
an egg in a fist is protected. But an egg in a fist
does not become a bird.
If I hold an egg tightly,
what emerges is not bird

or tendril but
hatchet: to break out,
the thing becomes its own

weapon; yolk becomes axe.
But what breaks from the shell
is a blade with a handle of hair.
We knit and needle around
    the room; the day is tiresome,
    becoming more so. I’m circling about,

looking for my thimble,
    my seam ripper. The spinster
    who spins around the room

is not my mother. She has a tongue
    like a sharp cutting thing. She spins
    slowly, she is like a deliberate wind

made of iron. She is
    the pot I take from the fire
    but would like to watch curl

into its own burning. Father,
    I am your youngest. Let me
    place a pillow near your head. Buy me

some leather, or let’s go fishing.
    I know you’re worth half a million
    in gold; I would like to summer

in Buzzard Bay. Buy me
    theater tickets, give me a house
    on the Hill. Open your fist: you’ll find

a golden egg. Father,
    your name fits inside
    my own. Father, you have enemies.
After the second burglary, 1891.

Every robbery happens
twice: the taking of the thing,
and the reminder of the theft

when something else is stolen.
    I was robbed of my mother,
    and every robbery happens twice:

a body seized, then the loss
    recalled when something else
    is taken. A set of silver, then

a candlestick. Our barn
    was ransacked, my mother
    gone again when the horseshoes

were stolen. In the space
    she used to occupy, the horses
    nest in hay. At times I weave

their manes together.
    There are times in which
    I intertwine their dark tails.
Thursday morning before the homicide, August 1892.

Today I am bleeding
   and crave pears. I steal three,
      then search the barn for pieces
of iron, hoping to fish
   with my father. August
      is in full ache and my dress
is stained, the India silk
   ruined. In the parlor,
      father, I watch you sleep,
but there’s a needle
   in my eye and lead in my shoe.
      An iron hot from the fire,
I burn holes through
   all of your clothes. I am
      a bad tendril of smoke. Father,
would you like the window
   open? Window closed? Something
      is closing between tenses—between
about to burn and
   burning, about to sleep
      and sleeping—the window closes.
During the funeral of Andrew Jackson Borden, August 1892.

It’s Sunday and I want
to watch you sleep. I imagine
you curled up like a pill bug,
a tiny armored thing,
arms crossed at the wrist
in your closed box. I want
to fix the pillow
by your head; I’d like
to close your book, but

those who never left us
never learn to leave.
They become the eye’s
own fissure—there
where the iris splits
is where you reside. There

is a fire in the yard
and a lead sinker
in the hearth; the space

you left is filled
with dirt and a hatchet’s
head. I see you sleeping,
sitting up, dreaming
of Mother and her buried hair,
her palms cradling your fissured face.
On trial, under oath, June 1893.

“I am one of many splinters
    from the handle of the axe;
        I am one of many splinters
from the skull of my father.
    An afterthought, a scrap
        on the tainted floorboards;
a quiet and contingent
    casualty. I swear I am a bird
        with an arrow through its head,
or a bird with a false arrow
    strapped to its tiny unbroken
        skull. In her beak she carries
twigs. She carries in her beak
    many bones, which could be
        from my own broken wrist.”
At Maplecroft after the acquittal, July 1893.

At times like these,
    when I have no need
    for arsenal, I become my own
operetta. Without
        leading man, opus or foil,
        I breakfast on whiskey and quince
but dream of tightened hair
        and playbills, the drama
        of taking the stage by force.
And this is the problem:
        like a furnace, I consume;
        like a furnace, I resolve chaos
through bonfire. I am
        both aria and applause:
        the sustained melody, the long bravo,
then an entire audience
        walking the streets,
        looking for its origin.
Posthumous Ballad, or Lizzie Borden Responds to Her Own Eulogy, 1927.

There is a quarrel
between the yolk in me
and the murmur above ground:

let me set things straight.
An egg in a fist can never turn
into a bird; but an egg in a fist

will never implode. Now
that Maplecroft has turned
museum, there are too many beds

and breakfasts, too many
pairs of shoes. I was never
paired and never pained. One would like,

though, to see one’s hair
across the pillow from the one
loved. In my dark box is Mother

unraveled; what used to be
yolk has burst, like a blade,
from its shell. I’d like to climb

inside and swing
from the braid, but I am egg-
shell and hatchet handle, a ruse

without a story. I tell
the audience: Don’t call my name,
you’d be looking for a forgery in an empty room.
III.
Welcome, voyeur, to the Gallery of Unrecoverable Objects.
You derive your pleasure from looking? We'll sate your need for novelty.

As curator I'll give you flash and flair, but unlike the magpie, I'll withdraw all inflection from the giving.

Follow the arrows on the floor, etched with ancient pencils. Disregard the broom-tailed dogs that sniff our every move; they'll sweep away the crumbs you've dropped for those who'd seek you out.

Do not observe the wallflower as we pass. Her fear of strange faces is crippling, and though she's well secluded among vines, she will not last the night.

Now look both ways down the Corridor of Infinite Regress. At one end you'll see the landlocked lighthouse, replicated in our mirrored walls; at the other, elephant garlic on parade. And here is the Famous Poet, nailing an egg to the floor.

Do not mind the Poet, for it is his duty to fasten his goods to the ground. The floor will yield to his nailing; the egg will not.

Gentleman, Ladies, the Great Hall of Historical Poems is closed for maintenance. So, too, the Hall of Half-Finished Crosswords, Faulty Soufflés, and Unforwarded Mail. Above the lobby and encased in amber, an ancient tree frog sits. It holds in its mouth the key to the bricked-up door at the Knickerbocker Hotel.

In the event of an emergency, melt the amber down. While you wait,
take care to avoid the Pool of Tears. It is, dear patrons, a trick o’ the eye
designed to produce sorrow in the sighted. And here lies the Failed Poet:

she had a happy childhood, but her soups lacked salt. Her epitaph reads,

*You caught me mid-wink, dear reader. Watch as I put on my fascinator.*

*These are crumbs that were my eyes, and of my bones are buttons made.*
*If you desire Golden Advice, seek, out of better books, wisdom.*

Patrons, the Famous and the Failed Poet are one. See how they lean
on the fixed arm of the sewing machine? They wear the treadle out.

If, like children, you fear what you've seen, take the stairs. You’ll have nowhere
to go but up, but don’t agonize over the trail you’ve left;

it will be doggedly swept, the arrows washed away in the rain. It will be
as if you were never here; were one of many lenses dialed back into the telescope.
Outside the city, rattle weed snags the trash. Night and its millions of pamphlets, every kind of advertisement. It is Saturday,

and Vegas is a hot wire strung above a chlorine pool, a bulb surrounded by nothing. There are women nearby.

They glitter for you—they sing as if undoing their husbands’ belt buckles. Ambivalence is a mumbling groom gazing on the bridesmaids. Leave the open bar, the pool tables, the girls ready to do everything. Leave the salt, the air dividing; the taxi with its ignition humming, this penthouse shiny and blank as Nevada and the earth surrounding, willing silence.
I went to the city, came back with Technicolor. I came back
with radio waves and ticket stubs. Lots of ballpoint pens, nothing temporary.

Never wanting all that neon, I dismantled the structure, uncoiled
the blueprints, turned downtown’s steel wool into quilting bees

and horse apples. Doesn’t each history contain another, possible body?
The husk that could have happened.

Here, we bury our food to keep it cool. We shuck our own corn, just think night
and it crops up. Here, repetition is the opposite of excursion.

Everywhere, repetition is the opposite of excursion. Why is it
all I have are pencils when I want to leave something permanent? Or is what I want
to leave anywhere for good, never come back—
I was in the middle of a sentence about evening. Even landscape
disintegrates. Do people still take lovers? Who says lovers anymore?
What’s seductive is the absorption of one image into another: taillights. Box-
cars. Apples in all of my needles’ eyes. A bad fever, this drive for departure—
when I come back I will come back as someone’s sister,

a little unkempt, lost in a field of corkscrews. Wanting camaraderie,
I will bring a strawberry buckle. Wanting something to unbutton, I will bring
eyeliner, tickets to tonight’s game. I will come back, having forgotten
I had ever left. Had ever torn the husk to its quick.
ODE TO GRAMMAR

Metal-mouth, it takes years to set the overbite right, to gas the nervous tooth at the root.

Your pencil erases the twenty-fifth rib, shatters the eleventh knuckle, slices the third nipple.

Iodine to thumb-sucker, leaf-blower to every misarranged leaf; a machete taken to the beetle-eaten trees.

O to be loose and unfixable! To be shrill, boozy, a karaoke tune sung by the whole bar; a terminal case, bright without consequence.
AS A DEBUTANTE I ADJUSTED MY HATPIN

In the year of Our Lord the Electric Chair,
in the year of the Boozehound and the Unhooked Corset,
a lick of salt troubled my tongue.
A lick troubled me into telling the green girls
how to swing from the hundred-footed maple,
and the drowning woman how to sink into the river's bed.
As with all things, the difficulty lies
in making maneuvers look effortless.

In this year of the Obvious Ankles, rouge is applied
with a heavy hand. Cheekbones are achieved
through sucking. Tired of tiny perfumes,
I want to be your voix de ville.
both weft and warp, motive and cue.
Watch as I unfurl a web from my wrist.
When it flies, the trapeze artist sets sail;
in each arm, a bunch of begonias. Look how she
tosses her stems to the ushers.

If the sideshow acts fall through—
the moon walkers, the cloud counters—give me a spoon.
I'll be the Depressor of Tongues, the one
to observe every soft palate. The candy-flossing crowd
opens wide, but the stagehand gives me the hook.
Now I play to the haircuts,
the last of the Disappointment Acts.
I'm the tooth that cuts the sucked cheek,
one of a thousand pennies sewn to the vaudevillian's gown.
Cento: But I, Being Young and Foolish

But I, being young and foolish, against the verge of sky
    as other sadesses fall across the democracy of objects,

I, being young and foolish,
    haul to the tip of your tongue and I look and look:

the troubled robins, once more in the handkerchief trees
    create a hurt that whispers;

grief brought to numbers, and the storm
    clouds the light, where the water hardly moves.

In my doorway with nothing to say,
    being young and foolish, I look and look:

sitting alone with your tea and your crime,
    there’s a light in your eye that keeps.

And then the winter’s long
    then it’s longer than afterwards

and I, being young and fretful
    waited for you to fall into admirable fooling.

How strange, how I’ve mistaken you for somebody else,
    somebody to slip into my shirt at dusk

and be the heart’s boat. I am two fools, I know,
    for loving, and for saying so.
I want to part company with the storm,
    the congenital heartbreak, purge sea water’s fretful salt away;

but the emotion is, after all, an artfully conjured gesture
    and seems, briefly, to be a fire escape.

Come along, Fool, it’s on the tip of your tongue:
    loosen up your magic, be the heart’s boat.

How strange, how, being young and foolish,
    I am for all waters, with nothing to say.

What’s true of oceans is true, of course, of poems:
    you’ll drown, dear. You’ll drown.

‘Tis a naughty night to swim in;
    this pitch of tenderness will turn us all to fools.
HAUTE COUTURE GROTESQUE, OR TALKING ABOUT MY GENERATION

After the mild war, the war that seemed to only last an hour, we noticed many different kinds of sky. Each advertised its own demise: one atomic, one apocalyptic, another ironic. We learned to live with it. Here in the Year of the Bore, the Year of the Stethoscope, we are told the weather will go from balmy to brutal in twelve hours flat. We are told

*It's a miniature winter,* but it’s a winter that keeps on happening. It’s one long cough on the way to April. Some of us subscribe to the Chicken Noodle diet, while the rest swear by Wonder Bread, the vodka-cigarette method, the Quaker Oats technique. We are told *Try to get some sleep.* In retaliation, we hit the town and make requests:

*I'll have a Greyhound, a Scotch and soda. I’ll have a double Sazerac.* Despite the drop in egg count, we are forever photogenic:

we’ve found a way to bottle the juice of the pomegranate, we know all sorts of synonyms for *stimulus.*

Though the view from the rooftop’s spectacular, we’ve evolved past our need for eyes; we’re hoping the skies will implode after last call, that we can still hear the weather, that someone will tell us what to expect.
We who don’t know
what to call ourselves
look to the west
for new temperatures.

Some endless Idaho winter
decides to arrive
in thin light disguised
as a wool dress:
dilapidation,
in a word, and you

breaking the bones
of the fish with your teeth.

At night,
we find our voices
in boxes of snuff;
we wrap the limb in gauze

before the wound
knows what to call itself.
From 1956

After the dieback swings in with the newborns
 and heavy metal pollution cradles the cornfields,

after the salt hill is bulldozed to make way
 for the suburb, and we throw pepper

over the shoulders of skeptical neighbors
 to distract from the lack of party platters,

after the nuclear umbrella blooms and withers
 but brings with it dazzling calendar photos,

and the lichens pull away from the rocks
 and the rocks pull away from their beds,

after each Susan wears a black eye and lives
 in the noise that comes from nothing,

after we’ve lost our guests, and the garden too,
 and after the trees have thanked us and left,

you will come back, but not like a fad or a father;
 you will come back like an upended coffin,

a single grave relocated for no reason;
 or you will come like a thing found

accidentally, a seed between two molars;
 you will show the mouth its own ruin, its fire

and calculation of fire, will shed the sleeping coat
 of earth and wear its ellipsis, but wear it quietly.
THE CARTOONIST’S DAUGHTER

In the comedy of snapshots, I was backgrounded: was the wall full of flowers or the saddest lobster in the tank,

which still was somehow funny. In my father’s monochrome eye, in the rough sketch and single panel gag

the girl with the torn stocking was me, Our Darling of the Smudged Cheeks. The little one who caught the punch-
lines before they hit the trash, and the pencils that fell from the pockmarked ceiling. But all his comic strips

keep losing their edge; they can’t fill enough of this room’s balloons to trigger any sort of chuckle. Writing from inside a garbage can,

I’m waiting for the A-ha! moment, for the Alley-Oop into real-time laughter—wanting the joke to slip on its own peel

and the eraser to do its job. I am the colorist of muted marvels, the laugh drawn out and drawn in by his crow quill pen.
MACHINA, OR POEM FOR A PREPARED PIANO

With just one musician, you can really do an unlimited number of things on the inside of the piano if you have at your disposal an exploded keyboard. –John Cage

From the constructed clouds
The composer is lowered onto the raked stage
The vehicle allows him to land softly
We approve of its invisibility

Through a concealed door, a piano rises
It’s a tired machine, but a fine machine
Turning a key, nothing happens
The composer waits; the engine turns over

We think something is wrong
Perhaps the tuning needs work
But a bulb lights in the brain:
Give it a new breathing system

Filter the noise through wool
And through copper, cut the sound
On the hammers he places nails
The piano’s being prepared

He wraps the strings in tinfoil
And slides paper under the dampers
When he wants a dull song
He lines the body with leather

When he wants the tin to shrill
He applies multiple needles
He tells us “For an effect of silence,
Mute the strings by hand

Or dismantle the piano completely”
From its engine, something rises
A sound less easily defined
An opus of air, the tiniest wind in wood
Variations on a Motel Room

1.
The cable is out, ice lands in a glass. In this room’s wallpaper, birds get lost in the repeating trees and curtains draw themselves. There’s something the pain in your wrist wants to tell me; bolt the door, forget the light and make a tall pour of the bourbon. Use my throat as a bottle and drink.

2.
To get here, we measured the miles by the deer that littered the road. Always a hill, another Wyoming; the high plains and repeating midnights. In my dream a janitor hangs around the door, looking for something to fix. In your dream there’s a wolf that won’t loosen its jaws from your wrist, there’s a sharp shooter who’s got his finger on the trigger.

3.
If you ask me what to see, I’ll tell you: Look at the renewable sky. And there where the fence is thinning into fog: the cottonwoods keep their cotton. The birdwatcher on TV doesn’t know what to look for, he asks his guide for help. Watch for a flash of red, then pursue it.

4.
Outside, it’s raining. A bird gets lost in a wallpaper tree, and pills fall asleep in their bottles. In one dream, you ask me for a typewriter ribbon; in another, a wolf sinks his teeth in your wrist til he’s shot by a stranger. Our guide says The moon may be shrinking, but very, very slowly. In the imaginary weather, midnight repeats itself. In the imaginary weather, I’m watching the fog take off your coat.
**THE FISHERMAN WRITES A LETTER TO HIS DOPPELGÄNGER**

Dear J.,

After two months, I have decided there is an amnesia to all things. Even amnesia repeats itself: every morning's a lifetime of sonar and smoke. How long should I wait to go overboard? Who knows anything this far out to sea?

Our schooner is a small country gathering scrod, and cod, and pollock. Wynken and Nod’s wooden shoe hangs over us, and any stars are barnacles of soot dressing their rudder. My only grace is starboard-bow in the evening, a galley of sea-lavender and flowering tobacco. Every evening a garden of that.

At dinner we eat Tabasco sauce and krill. We are losing our teeth and growing baleen, our skin is dull as paper lamps and soggy. Scales hang from our wrists, they glitter in every kind of light. We float, and float, and sip poor man’s coffee, filtered and re-filtered, black and brewed and black again. Is there such a circling where you are? Such a damp survival?

If someone should ask about my profession, tell them I am a wheeler of the gurney of filleted fish. I am a pool cue’s chalk, a desperate ink. Tell them I play blackjack with the sea and lose all kinds of money. But the anchor chain’s my unending problem: an umbilical cord trying to snake its way back into the body, it rattles me on and on, it does not stay still—

(I’m sure I’m exhibiting signs of an uncommon syndrome: sea-sleeplessness, or sickness in stasis. If I stir, the world stops swimming. If I stand still, it moves like an astral storm. What I mean to say is that the fog has a name for everything).

Sonar’s the only way I know how to reach you, you on the ocean floor. In this museum of sediment, echolocation and its watery violins puts me to sleep; sailing off in a wooden sea, these boats don’t have names—

Starboard,

J.
AND DID IT ALL GO

Leave a note pinned
to the lampshade tell me

where you’ve been
resting, tell me where

in resting
your hair has fallen

apart—
in the folds

of your thinned sleeve or
along the curve

of a thorn
and then tell me how

to let this salt go
from its ceiling of air

how to unfasten these
buttons and tell me what

can you say to an evening
that never leaves
THAT OUR DESIRE IS INCREASED BY DIFFICULTY

Like a seam ripper, you
let the garment go—

each stitch cut, every
thread unpicked;

the hem undone
by the force of a fork.

And for good reason:
this frock was never meant
to be sewn, only split.
If night is a womb, and I am a child,
I return to my mother every evening.

In our kitchen, she jars every fruit,
and pickles anything that might be sweet.

She jams the berries, makes jelly
of plums, then stores them on shelves
in our basement. My head curled
in sleep, I am an apple’s long spiral

and a cupful of sugar. When day breaks,
I slip out; an oyster, I shuck myself of shell.

In other kitchens, I braid the bread
and scallop potatoes; I boil the tears

from every onion. Those uncoiled scrolls
bring out the saddest person in me: all

my thin voices unwrapped, the simple
clothing shed. But if night is a womb

and I am a child, I return to my mother
every evening. Tonight she is stewing
tomatoes and hushing me back
into sleep. Stored deep in the basement,

I rest in her nocturnal hum: am one
curl on her forehead, a sweet pickled thing.
POEM IN WHICH I BACK AWAY SLOWLY

In which the finished rain is the first thing to vanish—then the wasps, rid of their hidden nests, spin away and take with them shingles, and drainpipes, and all the marigolds.

Things begin to declare their obsolescence. The Catalog of Departure tells us *Images will be projected in rapid succession*—an anchor tattoo, then a kidskin glove. My mother and the way she throws anything into a stew. My father and his crow quill pens.

In which an alphabet punctures its own procession and ends up riddled with holes, each word an umbrella which does no good—Smoothbore musket. Phonograph.

*Collapsing a house takes time.* the bricks removed, the drywall blown out and the faucet dismantled. My sister sailing over the Dakotas toward another winter. My brothers forever walking out of the kitchen. We observe the ruined nest on the ground, its grey spirals lifting away—finally we’re taken, too, and the space we’ve left dries up: but we know this didn’t happen, and is un-happening right now. *Think of demolition as a kind of beauty.*

This world, a map composed entirely of circles. There’s nowhere for us to go; there’s nowhere we haven’t been before. The poet stashes her lines in a hazelnut and hitches a ride, while her double emerges from behind a bulldozer—zero and its numerical image: a few black umbrellas sailing away—
The wind brings sea grass, then a cigarette. The wind scatters razor clams all along the shore.

In a night made of saltwater, the ocean simulates the arms

I must have occupied;
I wish for a reappearance—

and from the aperture of an abalone, from out of its white spiral

my mother emerges.
Her hair’s tied back; she’s rinsing the clams.

I’m young and want to bring her sand dollars. I want to hover in amniotic sleep—

but something’s been subtracted: the milk from the marrow, voltage from the wire. The sea sews
hands together, then pulls them apart;

I wake to its ovation, remembering nothing. Saltwater

drags my cigarette; saltwater drags a few barnacles back into its arms.
THE DOPPELGÄNGER WRITES A LETTER TO HER FISHERMAN

Dear J.,

I received your letters when the last nets were thrown down. Strewn around my seaweed floor, they were a seduction of torn paper and scrawl. I'll be sending this one up with the lobsters.

So you're suffering from sea-sleeplessness? Let me tell you again to descend. No more of this wading back and forth, treading the gulf between sea-boat and sea-bed. The fog can't reach you here; its graying is a crime that disappears.

In this cauldron things are not so anonymous. Every fish is named on a whim: Scuttle, or Crag. Each surface sparkles, it's not just a fluke of vision. J., you are a desperate ink. You're octopus fare, a black thread tugging itself through water. A bit frantic, but that will subside soon after submersion.

If your only stillness is found in those nighttime gardens, down here the sea-lavender blooms unendingly; the tobacco flowers forever, too. Smoke rings circle our heads, we're dizzy in our own drowned vessels, we'll call you by name.

Abed,

J.

J.
THE AMNESIAC AND THE ANEMONE

Broom-sky,
wind swept by wind. Clouds
layered simply, as laundry is layered. Making it difficult
to forecast any thing.

You gave me
handfuls of the tide’s hair.
I took a little epic in the shape of a rowboat,
the shape of a shut eye.

What I want
to remember is the island,
its iron lung, castoff junk. How it was good to me,
not a residue. But what adheres

are fireflies’
scattered lighthouses,
that green blinking. What adheres is your unavailable
beauty. To be without history:

what sea
and what sad wrench,
cranking the waves back against the waves
against the waves.
In the drawer of my wooden pillow, I found a leaf.
From it I made eight leaves, stitched a spine, and turned it into a book.

I call it the Folio of Replicated Sounds. Like the lyrebird,
who hangs his music in my head, I mimic what I hear:

B is for bullhorn and bacchanalia, H is for the human sob.
For the complete laughing-song of the kookaburra, turn to K,

and for the decibel level of the male moan, M.
But it is the Leaf-Turning Month. I close my book and pluck

from the alder a twig; I remove its pith with a needle,
and line the body with graphite. A thought like a bolt of cloth

unrolls, and I scrawl it through the air: “If the dogwood flower
isn’t a flower, and the lyrebird imitates both chainsaw

and camera shutter, then I shall be both replicator
and replicated: the leaf posing and the flower it surrounds,

the bird and the buzz and the flash.” In my wooden pillow,
the pasture’s all standstill. I can hear it mimicking night.
NOTES

“The Wolves are Sleeping, but I’m Not Tired” is for John Edwards.

“The Gallery of Unrecoverable Objects” is for Anthony Madrid.

“[If night is a womb]” is for Elizabeth Moore.

“Saint Veronica Has Something to Say (I)” takes as its subject the “pious matron of Jerusalem” who, according to Christian legend, accompanied Christ on the road to Calvary and offered him her veil to wipe his face. The Catholic Encyclopedia (1913, 2010) includes the following entry: “The belief in the existence of authentic images of Christ is connected with…the apocryphal writing known as the Mors Pilati. To distinguish at Rome the oldest and best known of these images it was called vera icon (true image), which ordinary language soon made veronica…By degrees, popular imagination mistook this word for the name of a person and attached thereto several legends which vary according to the country.” Medieval paintings of Veronica primarily show a woman holding up a cloth revealing an image of Christ’s face; it’s from this context we get the “veronica maneuver” in bullfighting, a technique the matador uses to draw the bull with his cape.

The focus of Poem with Her Back Against the Wall is the notorious axe murderer Lizzie Borden. Her mother died of a hemorrhage when Lizzie was two years old; three years later, her father married Abby Durfee Gray. By the summer of 1892, at the age of 31, Lizzie was still living at home. Twice in the previous year the Bordens had been robbed, and since Andrew Borden was not known to be a generous man, there was speculation that someone in town—an employee perhaps—might have performed the robberies and subsequent murders. According to Lizzie’s testimony, on the morning of Thursday, August 4th she went to the barn to look for lead sinkers to go fishing, and was away from the home for approximately one-half hour. Lizzie claimed that upon returning, she found her father in the parlor. A local doctor, Mr. Bowen, arrived and pronounced Andrew Borden dead; he had been struck ten times while napping on the couch. One blow was so powerful that it split his eye clean through. After hearing from Lizzie that she had not seen her stepmother, Bowen went upstairs and found Abby dead, struck twenty times while in her sewing room. Lizzie was named the primary suspect in the case but due to lack of evidence, was acquitted of the murders in June, 1893. Receiving half of her father’s money, she bought a home in the most lavish neighborhood of Fall River, Massachusetts, and named her estate Maplecroft. She lived out the rest of her life relatively quietly, though she was caught once for shoplifting, and later for trying to use an alias in town. In 1927, Lizzie came down with pneumonia and died at the age of 67.

“As a Debutante, I Adjusted My Hatpin” is loosely based on the vaudeville performer Eva Tanguay.


“That Our Desire is Increased by Difficulty” is the title of an essay by Michel de Montaigne.
Jennifer Moore

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EDUCATION

Ph.D. | English  (anticipated) May 2012
Program for Writers, University of Illinois at Chicago

Dissertation: *The Amnesiac and the Anemone*
Committee: Professors Christina Pugh (Chair), Jennifer Ashton, Mark Canuel, Joshua Corey

M.A. | English  May 2005
Creative Writing, University of Colorado at Boulder

Thesis: *Peculiar Orbit*
Committee: Professor Elizabeth Robinson (Chair)

B.A. | English  December 2002
*Magna cum laude*, Mercyhurst College

ACADEMIC APPOINTMENTS

Graduate Instructor, University of Illinois at Chicago  2007 – present
Graduate Instructor, University of Colorado at Boulder  2003 – 2005

TEACHING

**UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AT CHICAGO**
- ENG 210: Introduction to the Writing of Poetry
- ENG 161: Academic Writing II: Environment and Civic Engagement
- ENG 160: Academic Writing I: Writing Across Culture
- ENG 103: English and American Poetry
- ENG 101: Understanding Literature

**UNIVERSITY OF COLORADO AT BOULDER**
- ENG 2021: Introduction to Poetry Workshop
- ENG 1191: Introduction to Creative Writing

AREAS OF SPECIALIZATION

Twentieth Century American Poetry  Modernist Literature
Experimental Literature  History of Lyric Poetry

PUBLICATIONS

**CHAPBOOKS**


“Thursday morning before the homicide, August 1892.” Hayden’s Ferry Review 44 (2009): 149.

“During the funeral of Andrew Jackson Borden, August 1892.” Hayden’s Ferry Review 44 (2009): 150.


“Posthumous Ballad, or Lizzie Borden responds to her own eulogy, 1927.” Hayden’s Ferry Review 44 (2009): 152.


"‘Is this about style?’ On Ken Babstock’s Methodist Hatchet.” Another Chicago Magazine 16 December 2011.

[http://www.anotherchicagomagazine.net/blog].

“[H]ere I’ll stay, enchanted”: Anthony McCann’s I ♥ Your Fate.” Another Chicago Magazine 3 June 2011.

[http://www.anotherchicagomagazine.net/blog].


SELECTED READINGS


Wit Rabbit Reading Series, Chicago, Illinois (with Laura Goldstein and Gus Rose): 2012.


Program for Writers Reading Series, UIC (with Chris Bryson and Laura Krughoff): 2010.


Program for Writers: Writers at Work Reading Series, UIC (with Matthew Corey and Jay Shearer): 2007.

Faculty/Student reading, University of Colorado at Boulder (with David Weaver and Jennifer Dorn): 2004.


Faculty/Student reading, University of Colorado at Boulder (with Tyler Smith and Peter Michelson): 2003.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“‘Something that stutters sincerely’: Contemporary Poetry and the Aesthetics of Failure.” Obliterature: The Art of Creative Destruction Graduate English Organization Conference. Truman State University, Kirkville, MO. April 2009
“’Surrounded and Singular and Simple’: Gertrude Stein, Jacques Derrida and the Origin of Deconstruction.” Craft, Critique, Culture Conference. The University of Iowa, Iowa City, IA. March 2004


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<tr>
<td>EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Editorial Assistant, The Cambridge Companion to Post-War American Poetry</td>
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<td>Poetry Editor, Another Chicago Magazine, Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>Director of Copyediting, Packingtown Review, Chicago, IL</td>
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<td>Illinois Arts Council Project Grant for Packingtown Review (funded): $1500.00</td>
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<td>Developer, Glossary of Literary Terms. UIC Department of English Web Resource. Created at the request of the English Department Head, the glossary is intended for undergraduate student use and is available through the UIC English Department website. <a href="http://www.uic.edu/depts/engl/undergrad/glossary/Departmen_Glossary_2010.pdf">http://www.uic.edu/depts/engl/undergrad/glossary/Departmen_Glossary_2010.pdf</a>.</td>
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<td>Speaker, Graduate School Workshop, UIC Department of English</td>
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<td>Review Leader, UIC First-Year Writing Program Portfolio Review</td>
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<td>Coordinator, UIC Program for Writers Special Events Committee</td>
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<td>Co-Coordinator, UIC English Department Second-Year Speaker Series</td>
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<td>Undergraduate Tutor, UIC Writing Center</td>
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<tr>
<td>Distinguished Graduate Student Teaching Award, UIC Department of English (competitive grant awarded to one student per year; funded $500.00)</td>
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<td>Nomination, Best New Poets, UIC Department of English</td>
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Nomination, Pushcart Prize, for “Haute Couture Grotesque, or Talking About My Generation,” 2010
Honorable Mention, AWP Intro Writer’s Journal Awards, for “Insomniac’s Nocturne” 2010
Runner-Up, New South Poetry Contest, for “Ode to Grammar” 2007
Rebecca Knottge Award, University of Colorado at Boulder Department of English (competitive scholarship awarded to incoming students; funded $1000.00) 2003 - 2004

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Poetry Society of America
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