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Mindfulness of Minnows

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MINDFULNESS OF MINNOWS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of English
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Fine Arts

By
Will Hollis

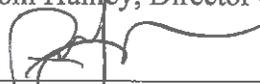
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MINDFULNESS OF MINNOWS

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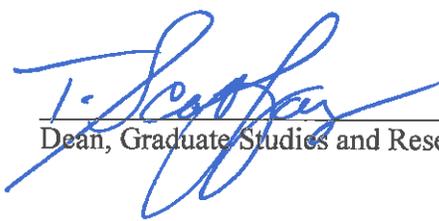
Tom Hunley, Director of Thesis



Rebecca Brown



Mary Ellen Miller

 6/25/18

Dean, Graduate Studies and Research

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MINDFULNESS OF MINNOWS

Will Hollis

August 2018

45 Pages

Directed by: Tom Hunley, Rebecca Brown, and Mary Ellen Miller

Department of English

Western Kentucky University

Literature is a deeply personal and interpersonal act from the author to the reader. In some way the author is attempting to capture their interpretation of space and time inside the vehicle of language. Through metaphor and enjambment, syntax and imagery, this thesis attempts to render the contemporary experience of the artist as he is grounded in location and interpretation. The lens used in inspecting the world is biological and philosophical, seeking and hiding from the truth.

Nature and science are used as linking languages in the collections of poems, seeking to be united with emotion based in the bedrock of Kentucky. Poetry is ephemeral in its brevity, but concrete in the impressions it can leave with the reader. The author has attempted to render the facts as he observed them in language which is specifically universal. No one else could have participated in the experiment of research, but all are welcome to share in the observations.

Kentucky is the pivotal element in this research. Experimentation was made with other locations, but the sense of place that can only be found in these hills provides the fertilizer for the elements of literary art to flourish. The author seeks to enrich the landscape that has created him, and to provide a snapshot of this land and its people.

Prometheus Giving Light to Man

You go out like a lightbulb.
One of the now-old-fashioned kind,
the filament corkscrew type, a wire
suspended between hoops. Electricity flows,
warms the wire. Heat transforms
into light through your blood, your bones glow,
but all of this is unseen, as it always has been.
You notice your tungsten grow weak,
your spirals slowly unwind.
In your middle a small weakness
acknowledges itself. You see it,
but you are the only one looking.
To others, you make note of the sun,
the lengthening days of spring,
how the bird feeders need refilling.
The weakness is confessed to your pillow.
You lose appetite.
That is the first thing lost when a light dims itself.
One day you wake up, don't want
a glass of water, but fill one with ice anyway.
You look at your filament, appraise your coming offness.

The Real Death

You sit in a corner of windows,
like a peace lily or a Christmas cactus,
and feel the sun one more time.
Light is no longer in you, and the flesh
is afraid of the dark. The wire severs,
but a thread is left.
You hear ice fall against glass,
and see the light of your mother.

A Laugh

Jackhammering cypress trunks, he takes a pause.
He is a Good Listener, ear pressed to wood,
reaching for the tiny click gnaw scrape
of the grub inside. His brain is surrounded
by his own tongue, a trick of nature
to provide extra padding. What would I say
if my tongue went around my cerebellum?
Come back? Rot in hell?

Jackhammering resumes, with gusto,
he is close to a meal. He slips his dagger in,
punctures goop, slurps reward. He flies off
to another cypress, another wall to break down,
another life to stop short. All the while
he laughs, like only a woodpecker can,
with his heart tucked away in granite
his head marinating in spit.

Cleaning Crew

When you die, if you do so
outside & do not get embalmed,
your smell hits the nostrils of
street sweeps, workers full of stomach acid,
wearing death masks down to their shoulders.
They rip through your flesh like Saran wrap,
get at the bits inside you. They are Egyptian priests,
inspecting your lungs liver heart brain.
They place them in canopic jars of birch bark,
hummingbird nests used for lids.
Your soul gets extracted through your big toe,
with a beak, without delicacy.
You no longer need it.
They bury it at your death spot.
Worms draw near.
There is no pyramid planned for you,
just droppings of holy men.
Souls are the best compost, at least
that is what they told me when they came back
with your femur and a lock of your hair.
I floss with it while I can,
use the bone to stir brownies and pancakes.

The Sandpiper

While he speaks I taste another dream.

There is sand in my teeth, salt
crusts my eye corners, a one-legged seagull
calls to me from an island across the breakers,
and another dream of the pelican
hauling tiny tuna up mountainsides,
and another dream of the rabbit dying loudly
on my grandfather's grave, the oak tree
to the left covered in woodpeckers.

He is silent after this.
Nothing tastes sweet or sour, or sour, or sour.
And the sandpiper plucks a clam
from a bubble in the tide's footprint.

The Pelican

The bathroom is walled in mirror,
there are no flattering angles.
The shower tiles are pearlescent purple,
oil in parking lot puddles. Twin beds
across the hall have dime store sheets,
the window creates a cross breeze
with the patio around the corner.
I review sun damage,
freckles I have to explain to
my dermatologist. After appraisal
I return to the balcony, look down
at the rush retreat of waves,
walkers meander firm beach sand.
There is a shuffleboard tournament,
the event of the week, but I'd rather
read up here, with the pelican nests on the roof,
the plastic lawn chair bent beneath me,
slathered in aloe, enjoying
the first of the evening's shade.

Spring Dance

Robins & swallows & sparrows & larks
make nests with sticks & lints & leaves & barks
inside dryer vents on house sides.
These nests in these hoses contain inside

an egg. These are tended until hatching,
fed insects & breadcrumbs, gorged, taught to sing
in voices ancient as hills and younger
than sprouts. Early birds sing to sate hunger,

demand more from the parents that feed them.
Soon leaving the nests, taking to tree stems
then hunting for nectar, youthful serum,
they take wing so fast you never miss them.

Taking Census

I define towns by the birds they attract.
Hamlets awash in turkey, outposts
full of plotting crows, cow towns covered
in magpies sifting through manure.
Portsmouth has an esplanade, a brick void
between tall buildings where pigeons gather.
Every fifteen minutes a tape plays
the hunting call of an eagle,
insists they scurry away.
But Ohioans do not leave home,
especially when dictated by higher powers.
Little grey birds with green purple yellow red eyes,
orange feet. There's always one
with a club foot, a badge from outsmarting a feral cat.
Pigeons mean people, concrete, constructions of stature.

I remember San Marcos square in July,
hot and crowded, thousands of pigeons
eating from people's hands.
Are there pigeons where you are?
Do they congregate at the exit sign of this life,
flock in pairs to the edge of our flattening world?
Do you feed them cracked corn from your hands,
use popsicle sticks to set feet of the lame?

Owl's Rotating

Like lazy Susans without ball bearings,
arteries twisting through neckbones
never kinking like a garden hose.
I told him words are my air, verbs are
what I walk through, nouns wake me up
in the middle of the night. He nodded assent,
pretended to understand, even craned
his head around a few times to hear
mice rustling in my voice.

When he left, it wasn't the sound I noticed,
but wing drafts. If you love something,
set it free. If it comes back, it was meant to be.
If it returns with dead voles, reward it
with a stroke under the chin, a pat on the head,
then rotate away in ignorance.

Beds Without Spring

Go tell Aunt Nabby the old grey goose is dead.
She died this morning because she wasn't fed.
Go tell Aunt Nabby to rest her weary head.
Tell her she'll never get that feather bed.
Go tell the farmer dig a shallow grave.
The goose deserves a funeral, tell Nabby to be brave.

I remember the recliner,
the feel of Nabby's silk blouse
in my hands, the hum of a
window air conditioner inches away.
My introduction to death was
through rhymed meter, visits to nursing homes,
babysat by nurses while my father
guided people to painlessness.
Nabby introduced herself to me,
shook my hand with an iron grip,
told me about her casket, the color satin
she wanted around her. Four years old,
meeting a corpse in the front room
of the Victorian manor, my Easter suit
constricting in December. I remembered
the voice from still lips, asked her
to sing me to sleep one more time.

Goose Lines Up Her Children

On one side of the road, before crossing
to the other, she counts them
onetwothree threetwoone
and proceeds to a barrier of blacktop
and brown-green grass.
The grass shelters them from prying stars.
Pampas grows up to the edge of the pond,
but she chose this clump
because of the black tar line,
the demarcation of here and there.

Lines are good for goose mothers
when they count their broods,
establish a destination to reach.
Goslings told “cross to the other side”
of something definable, lest they meander
the fields, destinationless.

It’s like the time we got to the cabin and there
was where we were meant to be.
Here was across the road the entire time,
a shed, a space heater, some pillows,
enough for bodies to lie with the night sky
and a charcoal grill,
here was where we could finally be seen
by each other and the geese
and the international space station.

Dot

The caged parakeet
was quiet this morning.
I cared about it as much
as towels left in the washer –
only when it smelled.
The little blue white
bird kept watch at the stairs,
the window facing treetops.
It could see branches sway,
robins build nests, hatchlings leave in turn.
My mother silently buried it
while I was at school. Pets deserve
shoe boxes. Dot was buried in bare earth,
feathers crusted with dirt.

Planter's Feet

You put your foot in a shoe.
Like a fool, you trust it.
The shoe is a den of lies,
a tongue that never wags,
always deceives. You think
nothing of the pebble
at the corner of your big toe,
or how it reminds you of me,
asking when you will come home.
But it's not be a pebble. The lie
the shoe told was that it would shelter you.
Spiders love shoes, the way they falsify
safety and retain heat. When your big toe
strikes the not-pebble, what you thought
was me is really a bite full of venom.
I am glad for the spider, a little jealous at times,
that it got to hurt you. It did this in self-defense,
a dying act before the squish,
and I write it letters of gratitude.

Heimlich Maneuver

You die many times
in different ways,
yet you wake up.
Every day when the sun
disobeys the curtains, nudges you,
it whispers *You aren't dead yet.*
I made this for you, too.
It is made for you,
heat from light & noise from birds.
You feel your body come back
to you, return from the small death
it practices each night as limbs
move away from the brain.
Remember the dream, the taste of food
in your mouth. Your stomach shakes.
As you go through your day,
you smell what couldn't be eaten,
what the sun called you back from.
When you relax at the end of whichever week
chooses to be your last, you slurp
lo mein noodles, oil & a bean sprout clinging to your chin.
When the shrimp lodges in your throat,
you are alone. Instead of self-Heimliching,
you remember.
This is what the dream ate.

Back from the Caves

You die to make yourself clean,
uncrust your eyes
unlint your toes.
Your back aches
from the twig under your sleeping bag.
You left behind
air conditioning, sheets, linoleum,
to remind yourself of
gnat clouds, decaying leaves, limestone.
But when you make it back to civilization,
away from the cliffs of the Red River,
when you step back through your threshold,
you ponder what you are holding in,
what is held from you.
It matters as much as the scent
from your groin & pits, the way
your hair is buttered with grease.
The shower calls to you, you answer,
like birds do when the sun heats a pool in a pothole.
Like birds you rattle your bones in water,
shake off grit. Water & gravity are dear friends,
closer than you were to me after all.
They do not neglect each other,
where one goes the other falls behind.
When you finish checking your body for ticks,
you reach and stumble. The spout of the tub
prays in your temple.

Great Atlantic Current

You go home, back to brine.
It's not be enough to have a human death,
you need to die with plankton and krill
in frothy waves. You leave sand behind,
the way it warms in July air. You feel crabs
at your feet, jellyfish at your calves, your thighs
heat as they kick beyond the sandbars.
Your torso keeps level, the balloons
of your lungs bobbing buoys. Your arms
pull you to the place that calls us
who have seen ocean deaths.
White caps wash your hair,
coral polyps settle in your earwax.
I told you to wait after eating.
When you reach the rip tide, it hugs you,
asks your name, prepares a place for you.
You enter, because the current
is what I was trying to tell you about
the whole time, a place where we all feel
connected, where we drift,
do not struggle.

Dish Duty

You come in and go out with breath,
not caterwauling. You do the dishes,
your hand coved in soap froth. The dishes
you found on sale in the back of Macy's
cleared of food, stacked like casino chips
on the edge of felt. You reach for the silver,
pull up forks with my saliva taken off, spoons
that stirred my coffee and sat on the counter all day.
You rinse the paring knife, drop it
without noticing. It's like the time
you dropped a hint about leaving.
The knife cuts you, like you intended
the hint to cut me. You look around,
see your blood in a puddle, your foot not warm,
your eyes guess what shade of iron-red that really is.

Anaphylactic Shock

You die when your body betrays you.
You bend joints to popping,
climb trees to remember childhood,
run in the heat to feel fire in your lungs.
You make peace with your right ankle,
the trick one that clicks.
You forgive your eyes for their weakness.
In all of this, you fuel yourself
with everything aside from the blueberry and kiwi.
Blueberries are lies baked in muffins,
images of my eyes when I told you
about my tomorrows. The kiwi
are more than distaste, and every now and then
you eat a slice, tiny black seeds
immediately implanting between your bicuspid.
But this day you remember why you stay away.
The slight itch in the back of your throat.
You power through it, like a run
or a vinyasa flow or a tree covered in sap.
But your throat becomes sap
after the final kiwi, hardens around the irritant.
When you gurgle on your own saliva,
it tastes like forbidden juice.

No-Man's-Land

You've been warned, repeatedly by different voices.
You ignore them, your ears jealous
of legs that carry you toward danger. Your eyes
focus on the dandelion in clover,
the white puff amid luck. You reach
for the drying flower, blow seeds, watch air currents.
Voices sing your name,
an alleluia without an amen.
Arms reach, some may even shield an eye or two.
Your heart keeps a tambourine beat.
A bullet whizzes through the clouds
and through you, a needle without thread
which does not mend. Silence,
then tick tick tick,
the sound of blood leaving your head.
When you fall, the others look away,
and remember before dandelions killed children.

Rolling Stops

You are in your car,
heated leather seats
hugging you like I don't.
You are going away,
because that is where you go
when you are not walking into a room.
Your oil is freshly changed,
your tires at proper tread depth,
no recalls issued
for your make and model.
You have the radio on, not too loud though,
your hand glides out the window.
People do this when they want to feel nature
from a metal machine. For a moment
you believe you are part of the breeze. When you turn,
the man – or woman, you will not care – coming the other way
flips you off, shields his/her eyes.
That is what you see,
his/her face as he/she and their windshield
kiss you and yours.

Breathing Exercises

You never do anything aerobic,
involving heaving breaths and sweaty brows.
The running you tell others about
is a lie. Exercise reminds you
of inhalers and nebulizers, breathing
with underdeveloped lungs.

That first asthma attack, in the hospital,
you were told about under-inflated balloons,
spasming diaphragm muscles, pockets of air
shutting themselves off. You can always exhale,
always get a full scream out at the beginning,
but use it wisely.

You cannot pull anything into you
except for light & the look in your mother's eye
when you turn purple. You tug & tug,
though no give, no softness lies inside you,
your stomach is a clogged vacuum.

Oddly, there is no pain, unlike shark bites
or shattered glass or thunder to your brain,
but there is warmth. Such incredible warmth,
like lying on the beach when your skin revels in sunfire.

You feel every cell in your body, down to
the egg and sperm you started with,
and they all gasp, as if they just
saw a silverfish on the ceiling.

They startle at their own need,
your mother watches you turn white,
she apologizes for not completing you
when she had the chance.

Chickens Are Brave

What is on
Another wall
a road to follow
before dumplings
Chicken will cross
search for the egg
He will chip
try to become
His head
too big to fit,
eyes looking

the other side?
to look back on,
on Sunday mornings
are dropped in sauerkraut.
and wander away,
that he came from.
himself back in,
yolk again.
will be on the ground,
at the cleaver.

Cardinal Hotwires Cars

When his parents are at work,
he takes a joyride in the Jeep
with no canvas top. He connects
hot to hot, the engine coughs awake.
Cardinal stalls at the hilltop stop sign,
but won't tell his father that detail later.
There's a fencepost along the highway
that's hollowed out. Last week
Cardinal deposited a twenty inside.
Today, he withdraws a mason jar
of moonshine. The clear spirit is cold,
even in August, and Cardinal takes a sip
before resuming his errand.

Cardinal Flies Between Power Lines

Hears humming electric
outside of lightning, feels
lost energy heat wires.
His little feet perch away from
snakes & house cats. A hawk
overhead leaves Cardinal be,
scans for more filling prey.
Cardinal preens himself, says
an Our Father and eight Hail Mary's.
His biretta raises, audacious plumage
for a glorified wren.

When I look at cardinals I see
my grandfather, the blood clot
shooting through his lungs
landing on the kitchen table.
The splatter had a little crown
on its head, sanctified the room.
Like a bishop flinging holy water
at Midnight Mass, the droplets cleaned
the dirt from inside me, the dust
my body had gathered inside itself.

Bower #1

Consider the dryer vent and her hunger
for nests, then consider humid gusts, holly twigs,
mating robins. Here, the heat of my laundry,
lint from sheets, cat hair, my hair.

Listen as she feeds the nest,
guards construction with a broken flap.
And then, how the robin finds her. And enters her
like he did his mate.

Bower #2

The dryer vent finds
a flightier bird to make its nest in
her elevated depth, her wooing place.

The flightier bird does chant
and sigh when the dryer vent
exhales, leaves to bring
leaves to stitch inside the nest,
a windproof padding.

The flightier bird does worry
and worry at the leaves, the brought
bed to protect a single egg against
the monster wind, the traumatic voicelessness
from deeper in the tube.

The dryer vent misplaced
her list of tenants,
but leaf-bringing sparrow
feeds her, reminds her of hunger.

Bower #3

Cracked sunflower seed, jute twine,
yellow receipt paper,
sit inside the vacant nest,

my fibers spun out on twigs. This
divorce was not my doing, unplanned
but still carried out with purpose.

This ill-placed hatchery. These bird things.
These sparrows and robins seeking to
divest themselves from trees, into
holes that singe young featherless beaks.

Who will listen to the song they sing,
calling for food before I start the cycle?

Height

How tall are you?
Do your fingers reach the top plates?
Do your toes touch at the deep end?
When you look up at night,
do you wish on stars
or are you with them?
Have you ever seen a front move in?
The kind that brings rain,
is brought by thunder?
When the lightning flashes
in the clouds, do you run inside,
or stay out, feel the air chill?
It's a cotton ball of fireflies, isn't it?
The blackness lit from within,
the sun clocked out.
Do you succumb to it,
the worry & human fear
we carry with us from our beginning?
If you saw a bolt crash down, strike a tree,
would you run to it,
gather the singed limbs,
knit them with your arteries,
plug them into light sockets?

Grounded Lies

I sleep with an open window,
the screen off. My feet claw free.
The night is humid with forgiveness.

Ivy climbs brick mortar,
brown roots settle into joints.
The lie hums like rain,
like its burrow is flooded.
We swim poorly.

The ivy, triple-pointed & pandemic,
pierces soil to the sound of falling water.

The lie scratches my feet with its paws,
I seal my lips, my molars buzz.

Trees Foster Truffles in Leaf Litter

Cardinal shirks his duty to the branch, alights, crimsonly streaks.
Trees remember boundary makers, grow in place for weeks.
The oxygen generator is returnable, waits on the front porch.

Cardinal is a red blink, an assumed dribble of blood.
Peaches this summer were in cahoots with the raccoons.
Lungs only feel full embracing tobacco.

Cardinal's wing is a splatter of phlegm.
Blackberries apologize, go dormant for the year.
One promise lies, the generator repents, rejoices.

Words stayed still in calm winds, morning breezes, underdoor drafts,
verbs like never leave me, nouns like future and past,
and history ended, trunks uprooted, unplugged.

Rivers Have Mouths, Too

Sediment spurts into bays
falls to the sea floor.
Silts up over time,
dandruff from mountains
covered in sun rises. River mouths
open, accept, call back
salmon they spit forth
uncountable moons before.

Salmon cannot tally suns and moons,
yet pass time with salinity, density,
cold mountain streams, warm ocean currents.
Salmon remember tasting pebble beds,
algae nurseries warmed by dawn.

River mouths remind salmon of cold early mornings.
They swim home.

I Renewed My Prescription for Sleeping Pills

These don't dissolve under my tongue
like the last brand did, or the night
words you breathed into me.
They are blue sourness, simple promises
of bettering tomorrow.
They pop out like your eyes.

I'm paralyzed before my brain
silences itself. Arms & legs
quick to obey chemicals, but fragile things
like memory & hope & shadow sounds
do not trust the night.

My therapist says I am going through
withdrawal from you,
brain hormones not in balance,
not where they should be
after years of meditation, months
working toward some Buddhist lie
about these night wishes.

A Multitude of Orphans

Mud rolls downhill, covered in pinecones.
Pines fall toward the creek,
prostrate like bishops before the pope.
Priests say mass in parking lots.
Churches strip themselves of drywall, mildew pews.
Knees bend on blacktop, fingers beg rosaries.
Make the rain stop.

A Prayer for Hurricanes

Gather warm water & only at dawn,
hide your face but extend your eye.

Take the weak & ailing to re
live their woes,
read the horoscopes of meteor
ologists, pluck the shoreline
like children count petals.

Tornados Are Possible When Skies Are Green

Clad yourself in a gown of impatience,
brown air all slurp & siphon
patrol flat land, call out to hedges
– disroot maples –
bury truth in midair
– untie mortgages –
this is the speed
of unmaking promises.

Windbreaker Pines

Erect on the leeward side
halting soil from blowing away.
On the northern edge, a little uphill,
sun rays still hit plants to the south,
water irrigates the lower crops.
The system is less about providing
privacy or demarcating plots,
more about keeping dusty earth.
Gusts whip across flat lands here,
channeled by the river valley,
all the phosphorous and nitrogen
whisked away, young roots bared.
Pines promise in December
a harvest not blown away.
Needles provide mulch, keep moisture
and temperature stable for tomato,
sugar pea, decade-old asparagus.

When they burn the field to ash the soil,
when they till up pieces of worm,
when they move headstones for
Midge & Dixie & Sparky,
they will find only mint roots,
runners that got loose and took
over an entire corner one year.
They will not care about mint, or the way
it tastes in tea with too much ice.

Turning Over Soil

Put it all over there, in the depression out back,
where the lawnmower spins in mud
even though it hasn't rained in a month.

Grass clippings, leaves
from the dying Japanese maple,
bucket after bucket of invasive mint
that you let grow wild one year,
still disobeying commands.

Add in the refuse from the kitchen,
the things I told you to put in the crock.
Coffee grinds from 6 cups a day,
lemon peels & tea bags from afternoon refreshment,
egg shells from the omelet I tried to make for you,
which was somehow inedible. If you take
the compost out to the pile today, I will forgive you
for not eating my love. I will add this chore to the list of
Good Deeds that you have done.

I tally them every moon cycle
against the Cumulative Faults.
If the math works out & worms get to work,
everything will decay into richness,
somehow we will be more
productive for each other.

Flies and Silverfish

I knew my grandfather was dead
the moment I woke up, saw
sun beam on the ceiling.
Up by the fan was a silverfish
carrying his last breath above my head.
He coughed his clot of phlegm.
I rose slowly, grabbed yesterday's sock,
pressed up until its little jelly body popped.

I knew my grandmother was dead
when a fly hit my windshield at ninety-two
miles per hour, knew that no matter how fast I drove
I would not see her eyes close,
no matter how many times I hit the wiper spray,
those guts would be on my front glass
until the next hard rain.
A rain neither she nor the fly would read a book under.

River

What about the river? It will be there
and it will be there and he will pull from it
and unbend himself like a sunflower
and there will be a fish on him. A cow

bloated black with gasses
and decay, tail sticking up grey like a flag will float by.
The middle of the current will grow on it. Where will the
river be? It will not see him and he will take

the fish away and the cow will float with the logs
or churn with the riverweed and schooling catfish
gnawing at the mud like beavers. And the beavers
will gnaw too; and the river will be silent and he will

bathe the fish in the tub despite the poison.
A barge will break waves with stolen iron, moonshine rock,
slip down the waterhighway like a drained tub.
What will be downriver?

He will get closer to the cow.
It will have died over a week before.
It will be the only scent he will remember.
River currents will shove and inflate it
down to the dam. The gasses will bubble

like a gurgle as it plies the shipping lane
of barges. The black hair will be replaced.
Though he will try to look away the balloon will
be replaced, replaced by sandbars,

and they will rise with silt and pebbles,
and there will be roots of ownership
stretching from Kentucky and Ohio
under the river. And the river will seem

very insignificant and for a moment a lie
he will tell to the cow about unbending men
who disbelieve the EPA and come to steal fish anyway.
The cow will almost remind him of other cows.

Beatitude

Poor is a thing we read about
in statistics journalism
that makes us feel a little bit better about ourselves.
The poverty line is where you get
toilet paper that scrapes,
not the brand that keeps your hands clean,
makes it seem like at least one thing will work out.

Mourn when appropriate and in the right jacket.
Khakis are acceptable in the summer,
but during months with R
charcoal is the correct color for burying.
Send flowers if a card is not enough
but never be flagrant or overly fragrant.

Meekness should be considered,
though not necessarily observed.

Hunger is a good feeling to have
at least once a day.
Studies have shown that reduced diets
can lead to 30% longer lifespan
and with the correct genes
we can now live to 100.
The One Hundredth Cake
is divine.

Merciful mutual humble forgiveness
is gold that sifts out of love,
in the light of a stream it glistens
but reaching creates a shadow.
The speck of relief
is precious ransom indeed,
and can pay the ferryman for passage
to Paradise.

Pure air is a national treasure
that will not be appreciated
until standing in the pearl market in Manila
and dry wretching on the fumes
of steaming frog hides
large enough to become purses.

Peacemaker children never get compensated
in the estates, though hard labor
deserves hard pay.

Allotment is a separate conversation from behavior.
Executors are not really those who execute
the wills and daily demands of the formerly lived,
more the ones who know another will clean
the mess left behind.

Persecuted thoughts become dreams
dwarfing and dwindling and dwelling
until they can swell and swindle
project on the cranium in the dark
with one beam from behind
a hazy supposition that become
all you can consider at every turn.

Proven Winners

The lightness of a plastic pre-ordaining plants, a rip
out of which fields wake, my

knees bruising with hope

that chemicals will overpower fate. Anti-rejection drugs which don't know
skin from loam, staining my fingers with nitrogen. I've missed

grit in my teeth, laid there with spearmint

volunteering itself for tea, juleps, tabbouleh. I reach for the running root
and extract the weed I imposed here,

throw pine needles to fix air into clay, and worms thank
me for exposure, inclusion, process comments.

How to avoid the lungs of earth in this plot
and camouflage my extractions.

Atlas

6:14 PM

Ruins of granite above Karst shale, concrete
covering top soil, fieldstones knit with grout
topped with sidewalks stitched with rebar;
wood bannisters to keep kissers on their feet,
frame engagement photos, provide alumni
specific centrality for school spirit;
roots busting granite at curves,
natures adding organic lines to
its own stiff geometry.

A couple walks across, sits, eats,
feeding promises to each other –
“This will be on our mantle some day.”

6:32 PM

Not even ten steps -
when you are silent and still
nature and her squirrels will
catch up. A white chased by greys.
“Come to me, O Nature!”
A lie, an impossibility.
Nature is not beckoned, is not drawn forth
but catches up
covers over
grows through and around,
all those things a squirrel
can do to a tree, because their
pulses beat in the rhythm we have
given up in favor of seconds.

6:40 PM

Down to up,
not against gravity but the way
I’ve always done this thing,
when walking down is easier than up,
why even glance behind?
Columns that grow as cedars
as they recede, roads making circles,
clipped lawns swallowing perspective;
a security camera with the best view
in the county always looking down
on newness, on growth, on movement
inside flesh bots. Infant trees from Home Depot
replacing elm, locust, maple,

felled to accommodate parking;
shadows laying down on grass,
stretching to soak up the last of the sun,
green with light above. Shade of buildings
elsewhere. Not here. Not yet.

6:57 PM

Pass by

the first whiff of jasmine

Pass by

subwoofers and auto-tuning

Pass by

buildings laying out shadows before bedtime

Pass by

the temperature barrier,
where hoodies are zipped

Pass by

the place you can reside
when you reside no more

Pass by

mud and churned earth

Pass by

birds overhead running the last
of this day's errands,
before the bats clock in
to claim the night shift

Pass by

reliable white squirrels,
proving you honest in your claim

And be passed by

men in red tanks
oversprayed Old Spice
breathing deeper and running faster
than asthmatic lungs,
which have made peace with yoga alone.

Pass by

skaters and idlers and loiterers
freed from cinderblock cloisters

Pass by

mulched medians awaiting plastic
enclosed plant deposits,
fertile arable land, only providing quarter
for monkey grass
and scentless knockout roses.

Uphill

Look up when you bring the shovel
over your shoulder (like when you reach up
to dust the fan blades, just on toes).
The light will drop into your crafted ditch,
catch your neck tendons
& sweat shadows, you will look at me, your hand
will cover your eyes. Will you see my face,
see my eyes, how they move, dart over you
and stay, linger here
and leave?

I blink you in.
You block the sun from
your nose, dirt covers your boots
(like when you slid through my hall in socks
and he chased your ankles since they
were the only part covered from daylight).

Your hand shades your dimples;
will I see ligaments in your shoulder
will it decide to keep your makeshift visor,
will the shovel lean on your hips?

Your scent is brought to me
by clover, picked from the dirt pile.
I reach for it, over the box from Amazon
holding our dog. I inhale
and pollen raises to my nostril
with your pheromones attached.
I throw shredded leaves at you.

“Stop it please. This would be easier
if I could bury him in the garden.”

But no, I want him to smell this
every day when the sun is back there
almost over the ridge behind me.
Maybe he'll think of you, too.
How you smell like mint.