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Award Winners

Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Award
Saeed Jones
“The God of War on Valentine’s Day”

Browning Literary Club Poetry Award
Mary Sparr
“Anne Grace Murphy, 2007”

Ladies Literary Club Fiction Award
Brent Fisk
“From June to September”

Wanda Gatlin Essay Award
Bianca Spriggs
“When You Drink With the Devil, You Drink Alone”

Zephyrus Art Award
James Matt Holland
“Tree Hand”

Writing award recipients are chosen by the Creative Writing staff of WKU; the art award is chosen by Zephyrus staff.
Dreams and Their Relation to the Unconscious
Mason Broadwell

I submitted some poems for review, and slept, and heard back much sooner than I expected. They said, You do not use line breaks very effectively, and your references are too abstract, so we're going to make a Hawthorne esque spectacle of you by reading you aloud and making your literary shortcomings. But we still like you as a person.
Open Mic Suspect Parade
Mason Broadwell

In the beginning, the poet who ran for President, then the silent poet, the antinomian poet, and the poet trapped in the vocabulary of an Albanian motorcycle.

The poet reclusive, the poet regretful, the poet adrift.

Next, the established poet, the lonesome poet, the mildmannered poet, the red poet, the blue poet, the yellow belliedbootlickingturncoatfictionwriter poet, the green poet, the pink poet, the tokenminority poet, the upandcoming poet, the wild poet, the canted poet, the selfdescribedoddball poet, and the poet who does not speak to his reflection for 20 years.

Now the poet hollow, the poet pretending, the despot poet, the phosphorescent poet, the lover-poet, the teacher-poet, the surgeon-poet, the poet who drinks no water, the tame poet, the jihad poet, the criticaldarling poet, the bespoken poet, the tomfool poet, the maneating poet, and the poet lost in the wilderness.

Then some hitandrun poets, the seascouring poets, the anti-poem, the unabashedpirate poet, the adjectiveless poet, the rooftop poet, the poet hunting parakeets with a shoehorn,

and final judgment on the poet controversial, the poet dilettante, the unidentifiedflying poet, the poet oblique, the sons of the poets, poets named after poets, the poet abdicant, the poet sycophantic, the asbestos poet, the wanderlust poet, the poet who gives birth to rhyme for words beyond our ken.
Hunger
Joseph Brandon Colvin

Turning fork slowly coils tepid pasta. So much plastic and Styrofoam, squeaking from soft fork-plate friction and scraping straws. My eyes darting to loud kids.

Slurp noodles as door creaks. Wind gust sneaks around cracked door, bringing new patron. Drop pasta to mushy pile and I watch customer. A thin old man, limping.

His hair like broom bristles, matted white string with oil and matching face scruff patch. Too-small shorts, bright blue in winter air, bare legs like mud slicks wrapped in rust twine.

Gold pit-stains on white shirt like tobacco-tooth rot. Bare feet bearing blisters scoot forward on waxed floor. Geek-cute twentysomething waits at cash register.


I try not to stare, just eat. He sits nearby, waiting. Tell myself not to watch split-concrete hands scratching bony arm scars. Food arrives with thud on cold table. I watch him eat.

His wart-skin hands dig in marinara fire of meat and steam goop. No fork. Plow-like shoveling of food into crusty mouth. Watch with waterdrip eyes.

Fork on table, gaining unused age, like antiques. Sauce drips like thick blood from oily wolf jaws and fingernails cake with dried red stains and dirt filth.

I look away, eye eclipse, breathe deep, walk out, don’t stare. Back turned, listen to it, like car-crash flesh, the sound of gulped pasta sliding down the old man’s dry throat.
Pre-Soak Snack  
Jason Brandon Colvin

My laundry bag scrapes  
along the carpet in the hallway,  
fraying to reveal its metal frame.  
It rattles hard against my calves,  
evoking winces from  
week-old bruises.

The brown cloth tower  
wobbles like a Weeble  
when I fling it into the  
corner by the bed.  
Socks spill out onto  
the deep red rug,  
scattered like fabric-softened Normandy  
casualties.

The fuzzy rush of  
faucet downpour smacks  
the cold tub basin in the  
next room. The soft thud  
of liquid charges a  
cloud of steam with  
audible rhythm.

I started the bathwater  
running, waiting for me,  
a fleshy Titanic, to sink  
in its depths. I merge with  
humidity as I step on the  
slick tiles.

Vapor billows up and creeps  
over the mirror. I see myself  
as muted Monet blur. Now  
plaid boxer shorts slip down  
my legs, loosened by the steam  
of the spurting water.

My foot plunks into the scald  
and bends in the liquid like a  
-pencil would. Red skin pulses fire  
and I can’t bend my toes  
without ouch.

I’ll have a snack, let the boil unravel.  
Puddle-dripping to the kitchen,  
I find the vegetable version of  
Bill Buckner in the ’86 World Series.

The shiny black mini-fridge  
was too cold and the carrots  
all froze overnight,  
right to the core. Naked and  
damp, I snap a carrot like an  
arthritic hip. It’s just ice  
inside.
Under the Weather  
Lesley Doyle  

*It's not always going to be this grey.*  
--George Harrison

Charcoal clouds purr on the horizon,  
their edges wet with secondhand sunshine,  
glistening like algae in the half-dawn.

The trees shove against one another,  
rasping out vowels. Branches become  
dark serrations that gnaw at the sky.

Even the windowpane forgets my reflection,  
remembering only the pale curve of my jaw,  
and hollow shadows where my eyes should be.

Polish Man's Return  
Morgan Eklund

Came back to words again.  
Polish man, returned he has  
from a place not suitable for the refined small talk.

Now a carved up moon.  
I saw your bones beating Main Street yesterday,  
like a carcass from earth.  
Head low, so the wind grazes your skull  
and not your restless vision.

Crazed man,  
now somber from mind's worn fences.  
Is it this estranged town  
that makes you ill?  
Or the nonnative tongue  
that makes you live in your head.

That makes you live in your head—  
too much and too often.
Why My Mother Falls Asleep on the Couch
Morgan Eklund

Goodnight to Mother, woman washed away from paddles and currents of the previous hours. Making camp in the envelope of the Living room couch.

She bargains with the neighbors, asking them to overlook naked glasses and crowded ashtrays. Too snug to host expired stories, too tired to consume scars tainted in evening coffee. Resenting movement, she swims to sleep.

You must try to wake her gently or else she will question you in the morning. She will tell you sleepily that she is coming but tonight, just like the last she does not wear the room that whispers loudly. Leaking the secrets of being single.

And though she does not display her locks and keys I know she prefers a full couch to a half empty bed, for it does not mock her like a barren bed but fits her like a sweater. And I see can't help but see that there is space for tear. Space for bliss. Space to fall.

From June to September
Brent Fisk

A few years after my grandfather's death, my grandmother stopped living with us. She moved into a small white house with chalky aluminum siding and a carpet that attracted wasps. A door led off from her bedroom to a covered concrete porch. She could settle in for the evening and listen to the Drysdale boy catch hell from his mother or watch the thin asparagus stalks rise from the lumpy lawn.

With this independence came a newfound loneliness, so she began to date. Joe was in his eighties, a checkered derby he cocked to one side, and a light jacket he wore even in the heat of summer. He bought my grandmother a small black and white TV and they would watch the local news at the kitchen table while sharing mugs of coffee. Sometimes she'd fry him an egg.

Joe wouldn't go fishing like my grandfather, but he'd take us to flea markets and buy us treasure: boxes of old buttons, whetstones, horseshoe magnets. One time at McCain's supermarket he bought me a bag of three comics. I must have been ten or eleven. I'm not sure how I grew the balls to ask for a Playboy magazine, but he laughed in his yellow way, shuffled around the store, finally told me to wait out by the car. The heat of late June rose from the pavement, and I felt waves of warmth rolling off the engine. When the glass door flashed, Joe came limping out, a small brown paper bag folded under one arm. When we got in the car he slid it across the vinyl seat. JUGS, the title said in great big letters. I-Ie let me look at it all the way home and when we pulled into the driveway I asked if it was mine to keep.

"I think maybe you should let me hang onto this," he said and slipped it back into the paper bag and shut it in his glove box. I never saw the thing again. That one moment of weirdness, never any other. Mostly he and my grandmother were sweet to each other, but she was in her fifties and even my parents, though they thought him harmless, were bothered by his age. So the TV stayed put, but Joe moved south to Florida to live with a distant daughter.

Several months passed before we met Dick. An eagle tattoo rippled across one forearm, and the Mack truck he drove all over the south took over half the yard when he'd stay for the night. Like Joe, he'd also sit at the kitchen table and watch the small TV. He looked like Robert Shaw from Jaws and the muscles of his forearms twisted and flexed when he grabbed at things. His cigarettes would burn to little nubs, smoke tendrils rising between the rough knuckles of his hand. Dick never bought us anything. Told us to put our toys away in an oily cardboard box. Tiny, our grandmother's beagle, was ban-
ished to the backyard, tethered with clothesline to a big steel spring Dick screwed into the ground. When we looked out our grandmother's bedroom window, we could smell the vinegar of the curtains, see Tiny cock his head toward the house. If we went out back, Dick would stand in the breezeway smoking. He'd crush out his cigarette and say, "Don't rile up the dog." His words were flat and straight as a yardstick.

It was strange to see my grandmother in another man's lap, her lips bright red, clip on earrings dangling from her earlobes. "I'm taking your mother out for a dance," he'd say when my father came for us after his shift. All the way home my father said nothing, the muscles of his jaw twisted and flexed as if he worked up a spit.

When Dick swung south through Arkansas to pick up a load of chickens, my father and uncle put their foot down. They changed the locks on my grandmother's door, and my uncle started mowing her grass. The kitchen was stifling with the windows closed. We sat in the breezeway drinking iced tea, the plastic straps of the lawn chairs digging into the backs of our legs. My grandmother let the wasps build their nests, let Tiny back into the house. When we stayed over those last few days of September, we'd hear my grandmother's soft weeping at night, Tiny's nails clicking across the kitchen linoleum, the silence as he nosed at her closed bedroom door.

an Appalachian boy knows his Dirt
Will Hollis

light sandy silt of the Rivers
eye grit of his father's sleep
deep red clay of the Mountains
blood of his entrance to the world
black mud of waterlogged Meadows
vermiculite filled soil
star filled nights
hidden in his irises

Each has powers over the boy
wetting his feet with Mud potions
washing his hair in diluted Clay
drying and encasing each strand
Sun baked hide cementing him against the flood

setting his feet firm in Shale and Slate
building his bones of Calcite
running veins of Coal to his heart
Stone backbone supporting
an un-bowing head

binding his toes with Ivy roots
buttressing his legs against ancient Birch
picking him up with Willow branches
Fern leaf arms curling,
he spreads the soil to sow his seeds
Television
Ryan William Hunt

I threw a television off a balcony—
it left
my arms in slow motion, fell quickly,
smashed
the concrete below.
People gathered,
looked up to see who would do such a thing.

I watched them from a bedroom window.
A police officer arrived—
broke apart the gathering,
looked
up to see
who would do such a thing.
We always look through some sort of screen.

He flipped the channel,
rather,
walked away.

Hostile Takeover
Tyler Jackson

I play Monopoly. I'm always the banker.
When no one's looking, I pull an inside job,
slipping a gloved hand into the black plastic tray.
I have hotels on the third turn and don't pay utilities.
I just won a beauty pageant.
One by one, the others give up in a huff.
I snatch up their land and refuse to pay taxes.
The God of War on Valentine's Day
Saeed Jones

For you, my love, my little blitzkrieg, my grenade: three boys with bloody noses, a face made of bruises and tears like Swarovski crystals. A jab to the ribs at lunch, a kick to the shins on the way home. (I used the lunch money I stole from you to buy this valentine. The bouquet of bleeding hearts was funded by the A/V club.) Ants thrashing under magnifying glasses, cats writhing in microwaves and beads of sweat on the back of my neck, one for every scab and scrape. I kick you, say Ares. I kick you, sat Ares. I've stuffed your locker with empty bullet casings and lined the school yard with mines. Won't you be mine? The library bookshelves are graffitied with blood. The cafeteria is dead silent. This is to say I'm hard for you. I dropped the bomb on Hiroshima. It whistled for you on the way down. It burned your silhouette into a thousand sidewalks. Last night, I dreamed of us burning down the school together: Windows went black with smoke, then cracked open like curb checked skulls. Desks caved in like punctured lungs. Stacks of paper like conquered cities, like piles of ghosts. I woke up in a puddle of my own love. This is to say—I'm hurting for you. We all are.
Jezebel's FM Radio
Saeed Jones

I am breaking under the weight of torch songs
sung so low that dogs have to hold their breath just to hear
the flames whistling, the tune of desperation simmering,
a quiet heat that crawls into bed at inappropriate hours
like a cheating husband just before he sets his marriage on fire.
Some rhythms distract us from others, he will say

as he scoops his wife’s breasts into his hands, holding them
like two piles of ashes as he tries to kiss away his lover’s scent.
I am in the business of collecting discarded frequencies.

Ears tuned to the hum of bizarre stations.
Two clicks to the left and the moon is chewed up
and swallowed by your greedy eyes. We’re driving toward a
field

where dogs are howling as I feed you a helping of fingers.
Your kisses land upon my free hand like seven veils,
then a plague of locusts. Your mouth wants too much of me.

I wince, returning my hand to the wheel as I pump the gas
propelling the car toward a field full of barking.
Two more clicks, a shadow stares at pictures of you before

crushing them in a fist of blackness. Your myriad faces fall
to the carpet. Even here, the music keeps a steady moan
going just under the skin. There’s a genocide of you happening

on my bedroom floor and all I can think about is locusts, the
incredible buzz
they must make when they descend upon a green field.
I can almost hear the roar as I reach for my matches.

Two more clicks, just static, the sound of snow falling on a
burning city.
Now, we hear the peculiar hum of the present moment: when
your wife
turns over in bed, and in spite of your furious kisses, smells me
on you.
Wood and Strings

My father’s hands remind me of the smell of a guitar, when as a kid I would stick my nose in the hole and smell rusty wood. There is something about the rusty steel smell of the strings and, well, the smell of the wood, it depends; if the guitar is cheap it may be basswood. But my father had an array of acoustic guitars. Some mahogany. Some alder or swamp ash.

On our camping trips he would play guitar, firelight morphed his black beard into blue or gray. His pupils pulsed. He would sing “Puff the Magic Dragon,” sometimes three or four times by my request, but every time with the passion still as resonant as the crickets and tree frogs that were the backing vocals on the Late Show with Mother Nature. When I was finally put to bed he’d play softer. I heard him outside the tent, stopping abruptly for a swig of a beer (he would only have one or two) or to light a cigarette. Then starting again, tuning his guitar. His knuckles would tap on the acoustic wood. I loved the soft rasp of his fingers sliding on the strings.

I don’t remember much about the divorce. I remember finding those pamphlets that support groups send to divorced parents on my father’s kitchen table. “It’s Not Your fault: A Guide to Talking to Your Children.” Seeing those was like seeing Jesus on acid, something unconfirmed. I don’t think dad or mom ever talked very much to me or my brother about the divorce. It never occurred to me it could be my fault until I saw those pamphlets. So I turned the pages but nothing in the FAQ section satisfied my younger curiosity. I also remember my father’s wood working shop in the garage and my mother yelling at him all the time before the divorce, her face contorted. I didn’t like it when her face was like that. So I would go outside and sit beside my dog’s pin. I’d stick my fingers in the fencing and she’d lick off the PBJ residue.

Half promises of pre-bed glasses of water are heard coming from a hushing soliloquy from the kitchen sink A common place to fight

After a fight I could always find my father working on a coat hanger or a shelf, either one with little curves and indentations, things when finished my mother would sell at arts and crafts festivals, I be-
He filled his cheeks with saliva like his best friend, Bret, said their clothes on the floor it was like a fleshy Popsicle Mother walked in on them but it was a dirty spot father and mother said the only thing they agreed on a feminine afterthought for a seven year old boy In the land of caped crusaders and those girls with cooties always running fanatical on the school playgrounds, innocent days, he kicked his father in the kneecap in the middle of a fit. His father collapsed. He ran and hid and forgot how to apologize. And his father told him it was ok, the divorce was hard on all of us.

I would always remember my father's hands, working delicately, on wood, on music, singing voice brittle with the spirit of the folk music he loved, John Denver, Cat Stevens, Neil Young. I would always wonder if my hands were like his.

Growing up I knew my father as the man I would turn into, I'd known this subtly, not like I knew I wouldn't be an athlete. As a child I was persuaded to play tee-ball by my parents I just kicked dirt, locked inside my imagination, letting the ball roll past me. I stuck with it a few more years only because I liked the snow cones I'd get afterwards. They gave me a trophy. I got a trophy for day dreaming about caped crusaders in a dirt field.

My father would be a man I looked up to enough to study him, watch his every move as a child, learning how to just put my hands on my hips at the precise cynical moment. I would learn when to sigh and look away, when to begin a sarcastic sentence with "well." I saw that he was a good man, a hard worker, disciplined, respected, always working with invisible hands, always the unnoticed hero.

My father didn't want the divorce. I'm not sure if my mother ever cheated. Four years later my mother would marry a man who would cheat. My mother would become extremely religious as a result of him "coming into her life." We would talk about these things sometimes when she would come to visit me at college.

I would turn 20 and a memory would come back. This memory would take place sometime after the divorce, when my mother was single and had only guy friends, and a lot of them. I got up for some water. My mother was straddling the lap of Ted, the father of a childhood friend. My mother gasped when she saw me in the doorway and I locked myself in my bedroom, awake until school, the next morning. Then at 20 after remembering this I would ask myself, didn't Ted have a wife?

Yes.
Ted had a wife.

When you're nine always explaining the way things are to the family dog gets redundant. You feel like you're talking to a wall of fur.
So there was always dust on my mirror's face before the ceilings rained accusation and condensed into the smarmy fog of swearing that went on in that house. I told my blankets secrets and the nightstand would think good about the secrets of my bed because it is furniture and furniture cannot betray furniture.

But the reverberating walls will talk.

Once as I was stirring my margarita wishing I had specified frozen my mother said, "You know, I never cheated on your father, if that's what you were thinking." Her eyes were green that day. She had come to Bowling Green to take me out to dinner in between my college classes. I thought of some of the stories my father told me. No they didn't mean she did, they just mean she wouldn't necessarily rebuke the occasion.

My eyes refused to go anywhere near hers. "Well, you know he wouldn't do what Roger did." I played with the straw wrapper.

"I know." Mother became quiet. "When are you going to forgive me? How long do I have to have this thing over my head?"

That's when my eyes shot into hers, "Mom, I am over the divorce."

"You know despite what Roger has done to me, he has been an extremely good stepfather to you and Andy."

My eyes dropped. "I know, Ma."

Mother's salvation probably only submerged her violent quirks; the tip of her iceberg is J.C. But if you went diving...I love the woman...she's got a great heart, but there is something about the way she says "Have a blessed day," as if she's gritting her teeth. You look up and she's not.

My mother will not like my girlfriends. None of them. But upon first meeting them she talks about her desire for grandchildren and my younger brother already has two.

My mother would also rather I was a "writer for Jesus" and will tell my new girlfriend this. Lola hissed at that statement the first time she met my mother, dinner at TGI Friday's. Soon Lola hated my mother and told me so daily.

"Was that your mother that called? God I hate that woman. I hope she dies."

This is where I could see the violence in that relationship blooming into apocalyptic break-up, pieces of us littering the landscape of the apartment we would initially rent together, live in, the way beta fish live in the same aquarium.

"Like Frank Peretti." Mother forks her chimichanga. "He's a good writer and he has a relationship with the lord like you should have."

"I do."

"How long has it been since you prayed?"

"Let's talk about politics instead." I admit last time I saw my mother I lied just to seek...favor? Or was it merely to defuse her Jesus-bomb. "I read the Bible lately."

"I am so proud of you."

It wasn't a total lie. I read Job for World Literature.

When I meet a new girl my mother will soon know. I talk to my dad about women I date and she hears it (a more tame version) from him, I'm sure. Then there are the Sundays. Usually I'm at the Laundromat when she calls.

"Met any new girls?" My mother is almost charming at this point, like a curious school girl, excited to see if her handsome son has met a "godly lady."

If I tell my mother "yes," that I have in fact met a woman, I begin to dig out whatever religious affiliation that girl may have and mention it to my mother out of pure desire that things will go right for once. "She grew up Christian like me" or "we were both talking about all the Christian music we grew up with the other day" will do fine.

If I say no she says, "You shouldn't look for them at the bars. Church is a great place for the lord to bring a nice godly woman in your life. A godly woman wouldn't hit you like Lola did. A godly woman wouldn't cheat. They serve the lord and will serve you as if you were Him. It says in the Bible for wives to submit to their husbands as they would the lord and husbands to love their wives like the lord loves us."

I think of Roger. I think of how he commands my mother to dish-wash or cook. Literally saying, "Woman, go fix me dinner, woman those dishes aren't done."

Most Thanksgivings my mother is sweating and aching, to and fro the entire house with the food she's cooked, placing her exquisite green bean casserole or savory sweet potato casserole at the table across the house. Roger watches the game and coos at my brother's kids. Then when it is over my mother frantically cleans up, hinting about how she needs more time to spend with her beloved grandchildren. Roger is cheering on the Cowboys, seven to zip at that moment, the Cowboys lead. My brother and I always offer to help my mother clean up, but she is stubborn and tells us no. We help anyway...
as Roger blinks at us with some sort of awkward silent shame.

I remember once accidentally calling my father “Roger.” At that point I was living with my mother.

“I am so sorry.”

A tear came. Then he barely spoke, “Its ok. You didn’t mean to.” He continued working on his bills.

Later I would move in with my father and because of this change in environment grow extremely close to him. At 16 I was living with my mother. Small problems in our lifestyles and chose to able

with each other. We both knew we had to break the ice. We both knew it was either brutal honesty or covering a lot of things we felt were vulnerable about our personalities. I felt it when he first yelled at me for skipping class. We became brutally honest. We became close. We ignored the small problems in our lifestyles and chose to live with them, the way friends do. He needed to go out at nights. He was single which meant he wouldn’t be there like he would be if he was married. I had the luck of being at a very irresponsible age at the time I moved in with him. I was 16. He had a handful of all the sudden. A driving, peer-pressured kid with a quick mouth on him was enough to make my father go from black dark hair to white in no time. Soon his salt and peppered beard stuck out at all the singles clubs. He bought beard dye because I kept calling him on random Saturdays with, “I am in St. Louis.”

“What the hell?”

“I’ll be home soon.”

“Come home right now. What is wrong with you?”

One day I looked down to my sweaty palms and I saw nothing, my hands were invisible, transparent. I really had become close to him. I thought of how my father looks like Eric Clapton, sang like him, who sang Lonely Stranger in his 1992 unplugged album, a song for the lonely invisible man that my father is. I thought how when I was eight I imagined that maybe my father really was Eric Clapton, secretly recording and touring. But the truth is my father will always be the single most influential musician in my life and never play for more than a handful of honored guests.

When I say unnoticed hero I’m not sure what I mean. It is almost a feeling I get from him, a passing vibe whenever I see him in a social setting. My father has been heroic, I just can’t remember when, which saddens me. I could say it was something like standing up for a defenseless bus boy, being chewed out by his insulting manager, but that wouldn’t be a true occurrence just something I remember instead of what actually happened.

He only received his associates in engineering, but when I worked on his survey crew I got close to his living. Because of his degree he doesn’t get paid enough for the work he does, now a vice president. He started as a part of a surveying field crew. My crew supervisor, a hot-headed tough son-of-a-bitch, once remarked, “I ain’t saying there aren’t times he fucks up a little and pisses me off, but your father is the only one smart enough to keep this company together the way Jerry wants it, no one knows it. I guess that’s the beauty of it. It’s easy not to notice things in the office but out here, when you have mud up to your cheeks,” his cracked hands suddenly at his face, “and two hundred pounds of equipment on your back, you tend to notice all the shit you get saved from. Don’t even get me started on the Richerson County Mine. Countless times, your father has made that hell-hole easy as pie.” Then he spit his snuff into his empty water bottle.

My father’s heroism is invisible, but if you are his son, you can see the faint outlines of it beginning at his black hair and becoming clearer by the time your eyes focus on his strumming hands, his guitar slowly groaning out a weary man’s blues. His voice is like a trampled monarch butterfly, wing shuddering like those seagulls you see on discovery channel covered in oil. But the way his kitchen clock ticked at 2 am when I came home from the bar, the photographs he set on his bedroom dresser, the way he’d ask me to have dinner with him, when I would come home from college, would all tell me my father was far from empty, despite his pulverized blood pumping muscle.

When father died on her fiery fingertips I imagined my father had knit her legs a part at nights on their honeymoon. I could never blame my mother. Her father kidnapped her from her mother after their divorce. Her father was remarried to a woman who would beat my mother. She ran away at sixteen and soon met my father when they were both working at a small grocery store in Louisville.

About a month before I was born my father would write my mother a letter.

May 16 1984

Dear Denise,

Over the past three years we have had 3 homes, different jobs, money shortage and a bundle of different problems. Looking back at them, we never let these things change our feelings, we were able to pull through
and keep our love alive.

Now it’s time to make our house a home. We will be blessed with one of God’s special treats when we have our baby and weather it’s a boy or girl I’m going to be the most lucky man to have and share with you all the coming events our child would bring us. Three years is not a long time in a person’s life, but it’s long enough for me to know that our love is growing through all of life’s problems.

Within the next few weeks we will no longer be Denise and Rich, but Mom and Dad or will we be a couple, but we’ll be a family. I think it’s the best thing we have ever done.

I love you with everything I’ve got and in all my thoughts and dreams.

Happy anniversary Rich “Dad”

When You Laugh and You Know it isn’t the Alcohol, Don’t Blame the Gin, This is Probably that Breakdown You’ve Been Planning

Back then I wouldn’t have told you the things I am telling you. The truth is when you’re drunk at home, alone, looking down the barrel of your V. Benardelli 9mm, and your girlfriend, is sleeping in your room, in your bed naked, skin cold, sweatless, unnatural, you don’t really want to talk to your friends.

But what mattered to me wasn’t the bullet, the one and only bullet in the clip, staring me down, begging me to prove, just this once, to be a man of my word, what concerned me had red hair, was 500 feet away, sleeping with my best friend. Even more what concerned me was the blood I coughed up in the kitchen twelve minutes before. If it hadn’t been for the blood I wouldn’t have put on Johnny Cash. If I hadn’t put on Johnny Cash I wouldn’t be thinking about red hair and best friends, furthermore if I had noticed that my girlfriend was a little looser than usual I would have even more problems and would have pulled the trigger right when Cash sang “I still miss someone.” But you could chalk all this up to me letting external problems bother me. But I didn’t know.

The thighs that were residing in my bed, at the time, had been hard to open. She had simply patted my head and rolled over. This offered me a small idea, but soon the work that goes into forcing myself onto her revealed itself as too much (let alone being drunk wasn’t a good enough excuse to forget my moral prerogatives) and I immediately took to coughing up blood in the kitchen sink. And there was no more booze. There’s nothing. It’s true.

I laughed. The barrel that was pressed asymmetrically between two furled eyebrows, next to some acne, nodded back. I stared blankly into the eyes of my dog, Fiona. Only one word would function when it came to my lips, “fuck.”

I didn’t notice that my girlfriend was wearing my button-up plaid shirt trying to wake me up on the couch. I was too busy dreaming about flying an airplane in the American Civil War to notice that my girlfriend, Lola, was desiring me madly, in fact fingering herself in that way she did, so cruelly, so sensually. It is as if she was trying to communicate how much I would never be hers. I would only be hers as her mere lapdog, who if came to her it would be better to pleasure herself then to just watch her do it. Despite my hard on, Lola picked her keys up from the kitchen table and left.

Later that day when I returned to my apartment after classes, I made Lola dinner. I made a spaghetti sauce from scratch, oregano, basil, brown sugar, majoram, I held the mushrooms. Lola hated mushrooms. Then we made a run to the nearest liquor store. It was tradition. She liked wine, blush mostly. Most nights we’d trap ourselves in and get drunk. Then she’d accuse me of still loving a woman that, it seemed to her, I left for her. She hated that I was “pretentious.” She thought of me as an academic snob. She had dropped out of college. And god did we move in together too fast.

But my refuge, the tree-house floor has collapsed under the weight of my yearly growth into a booze buying drunk driving son of a bitch.

When her fist plucked blood from my nose or cheek I would hold off. I went months chiding any physical reaction, the repulsion of it smelled like vile, tasted like a failed orgasm on your lover’s saliva.

“I hate you. I hate you. I HATE YOU.” She screamed after every punch.

Crossing the Rubicon.
I HATE YOU.
*Then stop loving me.*

Lola only liked fucking. "If you want to want to make love, make love with your hand."

*Finally, I thought with that metallic taste of blood rising from a corner of my mouth, her fist fondling my cheeks hard, intimate human contact.*

Then this night, the hands on my throat offered all the rage I still had, years of combating, because my mother had told me to break what she called a generational curse, and I hit back. When I punched her in retaliation I loathed liking it. I reeled in horror as I watched a fist so strange, all the markings of my hand that seemed so ethereal as if all the light in the room had changed a sudden satanic purple that mashed a crimson drop from her nose. First the disbelief made the punch propel even faster, the excitement of doing something I would regret, something that would be salt on my mucus soul. The placenta of goulish revulsion and sadism was lying sloppy on my apartment carpet, bloody like pneumonia phlegm. My fist, my response had worn out my moral-confidence’s welcome. I was now a mortal demon, an earthly incarnation of everything I lived to fear by between the ages of seven and sixteen, nine years under the tyranny of a loved one’s loathing and now the training was complete, all from feminine hands and vocal chords. As I ran to the kitchen sink to vomit I heard her laughing. I looked back and her tears from laughing mingled with frenzied saliva and the blood at the corner of her mouth. I vomited three times. I put on my coat. I left as her tyrannical chuckling filled the halls of our apartment complex, as if she was fucking Dracula herself, no, the depth of it went further than that, like the devil muah-ha-ha-ing at a dead baby joke.

I walked to my friend’s house.

You search for one perfect family photo in a rusty box glowing brown in the attic smog. It’s in a month reader, when you will be asked for in front of lawyer, mother, lawyer, father... Later...the therapist...Start here:

When my mother screamed violently at my father in the kitchen
And I ran and hid not under the bed but among closeted pumps and curvaceous foot lingerie and screamed beautiful poetry
a slew of profanities, every one of them I could remember, every motherfucking word I had heard my mother use.

They searched the house for me.

30 years later: maternal memories are evoked by fake leather that once perfumed a whole master bedroom of my childhood.

I had been driven to it. Making hate with your lover feels the same as making love, in fact it felt more honest. The physical displaying the emotions, the rush of human contact.

Had it been dormant all along like a Black Widows nest under my bed, jolted by one one-night stand too many? In the second that followed the punch I learned how cheap the word "sorry" can be. It’s repetitive strength dwindling by the minute. *Lilly. Lilly would have never done this.*

But maybe we should back-track a bit to a time before, when I would lay awake in bed with someone else.

**On the Matter of Sunsets and Ghosts**

That night she was soft. She was a million waves shushing, like in my memories of the silent beach my father would vacation us on. Or maybe I was the waves that night. She was the moon. She pulled me. But I was a stupid eighteen year old wanting one thing: pussy. That’s the truth. But that night I noticed her funny walk around the pool table. My cousin Sam had invited me out to the pool hall, something I never did. She was awkward at first. She laughed too loud when someone said something serious that sounded more like a joke. She strutted like a man. She aimed her cue with the machismo of a wrestler, but she eyed me with an unmistakable femininity of a goddess drunk on Dionysius’ wine.

I met her family the second night we knew each other. Her mother and grandmother were playing scrabble in the dining room. Her grandmother chortled like a happy corn-beaked crow. Her mother, I have never seen her mother upset, though it is rumored that it has happened. I might as well have had been an asshole then, it would explain a lot. But I wasn’t. I was eighteen and looking for the girl to score with. Yeah and over time we loved one another, I mean we really did. But then, well, it’s bad enough to be the only one to graduate from high school as a virgin among my three best friends. She was a senior at a Louisville Catholic School. So I had graduated virgin, was 18 and she was a seventeen year old senior with two other guys before her. School boys who once felt her thighs naked too, always they were wrapping school girls around their rugged teenager
waists, like the shirts they will later peel off, these women accumulated as thick as the vines on the brick exterior bar on Bonnycastle Ave.

I might as well have had been an asshole then, it would explain a lot. But I wasn’t. I loved seeing her jump out of her ’85 Mercedes Benz in her School Girl uniform as you could smell dinners being cooked all around her urban neighborhood (in the Louisville Highlands). I loved how she used strawberry shampoo in her red hair, and when she’d smoke a cigarette her hair smelled like a strawberry cigar. I loved dancing with her to the Rolling Stones in my first apartment then making quiet love because my roommates were Christians. I wouldn’t be asshole until the very end.

She was named after her father’s mother. It carried a scent with it: Lillian. Or Lilly as I grew to affectionately call her after we had a long night of arguing about dinner or after making love, the best ever made in any cheap hotel, at least any cheap hotel in Louisville or even in grunge-poster ridden bedrooms, Seattle rock bands looking down, on young love, young sex, even the silent sex in her or my bed; because soon the folks will be coming home from work.

Within the first week though, I was in love with her. She had left her book bag in my car on a school night. We had parted that night with Lilly’s sister and her friends. She became sick and I drove her to her grandmother’s house. I had discovered her books in my car when I got home. I realized she not only needed them, but being that it was the first time I had been to her grandmother’s house I had no clue how to give them back to her. I drove around the Louisville Highlands for two hours. I finally found her grandmother’s house. I left her books on the steps in front of the door and drove away.

The nights there, in Louisville, when I went back, are so much chillier than Bowling Green’s, so I lifted my cheek to the breeze, smiled, walked into Cumberland Brew, ordered a pale ale, and the bartender, I forget her name, but she recognized me, she complimented my hair. We smiled a lot at each other.

Then I left. I left Lilly’s ghost there, flirting with the guy who looks like Clive Owen next to a sign that says ”New smoking ban...,” flirting with all the old men, just the way she used to do.

One Friday in high-school I got a peek up Emmy’s organic flower skirt.
I approached her with vodka and cranberry juice but she was in my room jacking off my friend Bret.
This is what I cite when I am asked why I get so jealous.
But that may not be the reason.

Soon you have to deal with Ted.
Those who straddle him.

I left her ghost like that, not even looking back, not thinking about her, but instead wondering about my future...now that I have one less ghost to chase.

I was drunk when I broke it off, after four years of secure love. I had made many excuses for doing it. I was drunk and knew we were both looking at other people, wondering what it would be like to just put our hands in someone else’s shirt. I also had thought that I couldn’t relate to her any more. I was interested in books and jazz. She talked these days about pop TV shows. I had forgotten she introduced me to jazz. She was the reason I was “intellectual.” And later I would date Lola who would hate me for this.

I remember the night before I broke it all off she asked, “Is this about to end?”
“No.” I croaked.
I was drunk when I did it, drunk in her bed. She asked for just one thing, that I wouldn’t leave that night. That I would just hold her and pretend everything was fine.
“Maybe it will all be fine when you wake up.” She turned over, her back to me. I tried to spoon. “No.”
The first time she ever said no.

I fell into dreams about her. Long dreams about surprising her after school, sitting on her Mercedes Benz, with a teddy bear and a bouquet, dreams about her lap when I was sick, how she nurtured me through a bad hangover. My dreams ended with her sigh, the one she’d let out when I had done or was about to do something she knew I would, and she knew she couldn’t stop me. The last time I heard that sigh I said I was going to buy a twelve pack instead of the food I had come for. I woke up. I still heard that sigh, I heard it as if it was leaving out the open window, and I heard rain and imagined her sigh out in the rain, walking away, drenched, but not looking back.

And so maybe I woke up because of the sweat on my forehead that smelled like cheap scotch. And there beside me was a breathing woman. She was amazingly dead. Humid air all around was dispelling a quiet tip-toeing sorrow that swelled from my mind onto my tongue and maddens into a yawning gasp and moan. She was stained with years. She was used. She was stale. Left out over night. She was cold and remote, isolated body of lukewarm flesh. The hair, the red curly hair looks more like loose strings from cutoff jeans stranded on the island of a pillow. Her freckles were dying stars. I am old and gone, Beautiful Stale. I am stupid and viceful. I am impulsive.
I walked into her bathroom. I shrugged at myself. As I shrugged I pulled back my lips into a hangover snarl. I laughed at how stale she is. How goddamned stale she is. And I remembered just why I started dating her seven years before.

This life is just a moan of two bitter old lovers humping to avoid talking. This life is a "what if". And I have destroyed it.

I could confess that when I was younger I'd hide under the bed and spout off every profane word I could get my tongue on as my parents argued. I could confess that at 6 I was homosexual with my best friend who lived across the street. I could confess that I already have a new girlfriend, Lola, after getting out of a seven year old relationship with stale beauty. I could confess that I'm really just a coward. I could confess that in the very beginning I just started dating said ex (Lilly) just because I wanted to fuck someone and she seemed like the more likely candidate. I could confess that I am really an asshole. But I can't even confess that one thing. That one goddamn thing I won't even tell you, reader, unless you are really listening to my story. I'm not really an asshole. I just act like it.

I like the image
The bear ripping
Aorta out of a rabbit.
I'd like to be an asshole
But there are times
When I am drunk
I look at the blood
On my hands
See my half crimson teeth
In the mirror
And fear it more
Than anything else.
That this morning Kafka
morphed me into, not a bug
but a bear, a repressed
Asshole with claws and jaws
That are too big for him.

Later that night I was drunk. The beer was soft and the lamp pulsed bitter sharp so I turned it off. I put The Velvet Underground on my old record player. But, you see, like the half bitten fingernail that was resting on my couch cushion that she put there before she went to bed the other night (after ashing on my favorite shirt) previous to our

fallout, like the coffee stains that shadowed my kitchen, like the beer that sweated from my clothes and from the trash and the bottles within it that clinked as I walked my crooked little flat, like the drool urine stains on the sides of my toilet bowl and bloody tissue paper in the bathroom waste basket, like the knot flattened on the last page I read of that O' Har a book, like the encrusted blood on my fingernail because, like her, I was nervous, like these things she soon knocked on my door. I had a chance to set it all right.

But maybe one day, when I drive back to Bowling Green, I'll be approaching the county after Richerson on 65, thus leaving Louisville. I'm sure in my rearview mirror there Lilly's ghost will be on the side of the road thumbing for a ride. I won't notice. I'll be too busy thinking about what jobs I can get with my degree. What cities I will have to move to. Wondering when I will ever finish the last 40 pages of The Tao of Pooh. I'll light a cigarette, look into my rearview mirror and see an old man dressed like the grim reaper thumbing for a ride. In front I'll see a sunset. I am following it because I'm going west and the sun sets in the west. I am the sunset rider making his way back to where he began, but this time taking that experience with him, reveling in his new moment. I'll follow that sunset hard, hard after something that I call the shots on. Following the dusk's orangpurple blush because the nights are what I live for. That one is just beginning.

The Wrong End

I only keep Lilly's ghost in a cardboard box in my closet these days. A few pictures of her and some sentimental items I can't get rid of are the only rarely touched items in my apartment. I still loved her when I broke up with her, drunk. I sometimes wonder if I still do.

Not too long ago my father suggested I get back with her. "It's never too late." He was lighting his cigarette. I didn't even bother telling him how much it was too late, he wouldn't know any better. It had been a year and a half and Lilly had moved to Seattle.

"I think she still has a guy," I said.

My father sat on my couch, one he had let me have. One that Lilly and I would make love on when he was out on his dates. He still isn't remarried. "So," he said raising his eyebrows.

"Lola came by today."
"Here?"
"Yeah."
"Dustin, she hit you, I hope you remember that!" He sat up.
"You didn't—"
“No. She just had to get some of her stuff. Gross, Dad. Why would I? Lately I have had more than enough.” The truth was I had wanted to. Why? And she hadn’t come to get her stuff.

As I watched my father smoke I prepared to light one. Then I thought of something. Once, about eight years after the divorce, when I was sixteen, my mother had called my father to discuss when he would bring us to her house, it was a Sunday, the last day of the weekend he would have us. I guess he had a cell phone then, because we were already on the way. At that time my mother lived thirty minutes outside Louisville in a town called Taylorsville. My father would always listen to the bluegrass program on NPR and I would watch the country houses sitting in the dark on the side of the road, as the host would welcome the listeners, “The fastest, the bestest bluegrass you ever heard, here on 91.9.” Their lights were on and you could see the TV blue flicker on most of the front door windows. My father had just hung up with my mother. He reached into his pocket and picked out a cigarette from his Marlboro menthol lights. He lit the tip.

“Dad.”

“You lit the wrong end.”

He gave his long sigh, the one I always hear on the phone these days when I tell him I’m out of money. The window moaned, leaving a crack where he tossed the aborted cigarette. The window moaned its way back up.

“Guess she still does it to me.”

I chuckled and pretended I didn’t like that statement as much as I did.

My father was on my couch or his old couch, depending on how you looked at it, squinting his eyes. He was reading my record collection, noticing a lot of Neil Young. I waited a second before I flicked my lighter, a Zippo my father gave me, one my mother gave him. It had his initials inscribed on the front of it. I waited, thinking how ironic it would be if Lilly called me right now, right before I lit my cigarette. Then she didn’t. So I looked at my father, one good look, then I lit the cigarette, checked which end and with a satisfied smile, despite all the old women he’s dated and all the older women I have dated lately, I chuckled, because if I was going to turn out like my dad, I was going to with the same style and grace, and maybe, if I am lucky, because I have studied him, I will know just a little bit more than he does when I get his age...

“I’m pretty serious about Trish. So you may see a lot of her when you come home this Thanksgiving.”

My god. They are already moving in together. ...or maybe I won’t. And I have to admit, there’s something comforting about thinking I may still be single when I am fifty. It seems to me, being unnoticed is the only way you can really get to know yourself, and maybe the only reason my actual best friend is sitting on my couch talking about his new girlfriend.

When my father leaves this town, driving away from the sunset, I think that this is the town that I could blame, as if it had its own set of Greek gods, a town in which I gave up everything for what was at first a mess of blood and sloppy kissing. But now, every time my father waves from behind the steering wheel and lights a cigarette, I remember, today, whether or not I was an asshole, I am not now. Whether or not I was stupid, I’m not now. And my father rounds the corner, probably putting in the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band or maybe even Neil Young, or perhaps Merle Haggard. I take out my phone and call a girl I met at my friend’s whiskey social the other day.

Do you know what she tells me? She strokes my neck, “Just enjoy the time you have with me.” Then she hides her face in my pillow to fall asleep. And I believe her.
The Tremors that Minor on a Beery Thursday Night
Dustin Meyer

I am a ruffled duped junkyard.

I am not a dream man. I have cobwebs.

I have not fully cleaned the dirt out of my suitcase head.

My lines are blurred like foreign evening suns. I am elbow grease that never met your wind blistered elbow. I’ve been hoodwinked by insects on the sidewalk, cheated by particles in the breath of all my questions. Conned by beach side winking sunsets, swindled by the merchantmaids whispering gospel in Florida’s gulf of Mexicana wavewrinkles I have little straight jackets for each sentence I will not speak to you. Forgive my clowny hands that do nothing for your white picket grave fantasy.

I was under the ear soil of earth while they spoke my portfolio which is filled with the unborn bones in your mind. The ones

I will never break. Never question. I’m too afraid of your arms.

Muscles like that only show up to turn me red, yellow, orange.

Then I fall. Then I winter again

under the frost of your bifocal sigh, under the breath of your passing, running thigh I wane into the first light yawned rays again.
Germination
Kimberly J. Reynolds

"Your thighs are apple trees." --William Carlos Williams

I've dug holes in front of my window to plant them in. I'll watch you take root amongst the scurry of ants, the squirm of worms, the pulse of the planet. Your arms stretch up in delicate arches, in a perpetual pirouette reaching toward sky. Your fingers will bud and blossom in springtime, the white flowers open to catch the slant of sunshine. Birds nest in your arms, build their homes with sticks, straw, little bric-a-brac strewn on lawns. Your arms will grow bowed under the weight of your wares, the fruit round and tempting to the eyes of the covetous, and I will eat of your seed, waxing the shiny, red skin before I bite into the sticky, sweet pulp. In storms you tap against my window, and when the wind blows you better bend or else you'll break and come crashing down on my house, and I'll be forced to get an axe and chop the rest of you down.
this old boot scrapes back and forth against the sidewalk. a cigarette butt, lookin like an unlucky cockroach, disintegrates underneath its ashy toe. many boots have done this before, to cockroaches and cigarettes the same. little death bells chime along in the foreground to my faint amusement.

i imagine, like cockroaches, cigarettes triumph all the cancer and nuclear holocausts that may occur in the next four hundred years. i imagine, by then, the earth will go blow up, kaboom, then nothin is left except cockroaches floatin around in space, puffin on cigarettes.

hell! they’re not gettin cancer. that’s for sure.

pacin down the street, i got this little jingle, goin: the end’s not near, it’s here, hallelujah, hallelu. warm breath is exhaled into the thin cold air. a breath cloud distorts my view of a forgotten scabby stair rail and i pretend its covered in blistering buboes

the stair rail looks so pathetic. i feel like flippin my last dime over to it, sayin somethin out of my ass, like: it’s ok, we’ve got this thing called aids now. i’d figure we’d all feel the same about aids or the plague or global warming or any of that death stuff.

oh well. whatever. the stair rail isn’t listening.

as i ascend the stair case, ground water sprinkles out of a cobble stone wall and flows into a puddle of muck. i start thinkin that puddle is god’s last attempt to flood the earth and kill everyone again, somethin you gotta get use to.

i suppose god has been tryin to get rid of us for a long time now that i’m thinkin about it. dinosaurs weren’t so stubborn with the ol survival of the fittest thing. they played fair. but, see we’ve got all our vaccinations, multivitamins and baby booms.

i wonder if god finds us at all like cockroaches . . .
An excerpt from

**A Tale of Two Houses**

*A Conversation in Poetry*

Dave Shackelford and Jeremiah Bell

I

Home is a chimney instrument.
Home is a sole garden with mint feet,
a recital hall. Fauna set for soot socials.

We travel lightly through dusk doorframes
blind to the flasks of the toadling brutes
crawling around the curbs of our canter.

I wanted a rubix-cube point of origin
a black rectangle from nowhere to challenge
lice eaters, niched in a dopplegang-monorail modeled on your
story.

What are these trails of décor
on spiced rectangles, bolstering the tents
of excited minds, farming the constructs
of an endless and branched worldly vein?

They could be Goffman’s cell houses
Savannah sunsets cradling elephant bones and cast off cos-
tumes.
Reigns of terror
for financial guillotines,
vice riddling baseboards, handling latex learning.

The universe would call it ten circles,
one inside the other like a pyramid
of rings, all on the same level. The bull’s eye would wait
as we began a series of foot stones in the water
where people were ants, and this house was fire.
These mile high squares are malleable Darwinian
dead trees are Swiss canvases
trinket warehouses
a place adorned in people
an amorphous snow globe
where even pedestrians are kinetic.

They stand there for us,
never falling, never giving in to gravity.
The stomach can tear itself apart.
I will never forget the flowers dancing on the front lawn
with us, with tied eyes and twine around our waists,
or the time bombs hiding in our closets.

Village Pinocchios
each one a fingerprint sticker
unique to each folklore hobbyist
with temperaments as fickle as any child
difficult to discipline
and loved more when they are unruly.

These places are bear cocoons
for the seasoning librarians
on the road for condensed immortality,
a waterwheel of words from our souls.

We weren't just grinding meal, the millstones were around
our wastes.
Our skin was the paint
our Mandela point of origin.
Soot smears on cave walls, ashes from what
fed us, clothed us, freed us.
We were Skinner
and his pigeons.

There was once an army,
a network of steamed grains, backs
to one another, each a fortress for brotherhood.

We were telescope owls in a field of bats.
Every hanging piece of skin
peeling its way from dry, red hands
has a story to tell
like a pair of conquerors constructing
the first cities of a newly found land.

II. Avidity

The “real world” is yourself.
Most of us figure that out in college
with the introduction of an unguided adventure
into a world of battled ignorance
stored on the shelves of fermenting lore.
We shake our bodies away from our mothers and fathers
and find new ones, while crowned nuns
walk the craters of a mirrored moon.
The dorms were little holes for homes,
the construction site for my future home,
a recruiting station for versatile social soldiers
with machinegun words to hold us together.
I was a stock-boy in a store of people,
filling the gaps within unchanging labels
from state to state.
I was like an army-brat in fast forward.
All I ever wanted was a constant forest.

Seasons spent silent,
music made under glass-
now a megaphone strapped to a cannonball.
This is James Dean’s face.
A Hittite after high heels.
I was Peter and his hunt.
My hand stretched for a coonskin cap.
A prodigal son dressed in baby fat and blue jeans
white dollops of hubris and his summer picnic hair.
Crash technicians do this for a living.
III. From Daft Doorways

The Zeppelin House, Cabell.

A home knits itself together
like moss molding its way
over hills and bio-domes of minerals.
We were threads inside a knitted factory
of tapestries. Stories tapped on the wood
beneath the floorboard pages of that house.
It was where pipes were forks
and landlords hunted Presidents at the front door.
I heard the ghosts of the three women
who slept at that house before I did,
with their curtain dresses and nature’s leg-warmers,
in the walls of a conversation.
I imagined a Zeppelin poster there
on the same wall holding their hearts
in their charcoal-warmed hands.
Cloud sails of nomadic fire
soaked into tongues of Titanic youth.
I imagined the house
as the Zeppelin’s older sister it never knew
as if they were separated at birth,
whose company ran from rivers
of wine and silent agents, spilling
in a town within towns of an Empire of androids.
The Zeppelin was built as a temple,
a quarry to protect top hats
reading books
to fathom more wrinkles and gray hair
crawling onto my face.
I was a microscope in the middle
of the vast network of a human tree trunk.
Green apples sit in whicker
with a shadow cast from the window
above the tearing sink
below silent, glowing domes.
It was a nebula of words

dropping water that smells so sweet
that you can taste it with your tongue
between lips as spit glosses them.
Pepper plays in ashtrays
as the stained oak moans in the early morning
before the roses have time to stick
the giants in the sky.
The Earth is a rock near a bus stop
shaped like a stone age park bench
sleeping in soft dirt of a quiet corner lawn
dropped toward pages of asphalt
like Gemini sees fog unfold from his pin-point prison.
Many merchants floundered their goods
like Maestros in city gardens
under street lamps of a bricked collegiate
community of brick scholars
while suit-tie ministries arm their agents
and stamp them like tattoos
and soup can body armor.
It was an embryo, a mother, too
standing within a city of propped megaphone jackets
ready to collapse like generations
stored in wine barrels and history books.
A fortress for grain and journal-tasting fermentation.
It was a forest floor hidden in a stream.

Pitt! As you were
an aged handbag held by a gnarled cane in an afghan
a lovely twigged still life in a ghetto
a last bastion Notre Dame of graceful aging
simple and sweet
as your footprints, in arthritis
transparent mountains.
You wake with infant skin, sight from eyes in pitch.
A does-bedding patch was here
a sugarless kitchen
painted bright green, cleaned to candy dish shine,
where summers ago you and a boy in toddler handmedowns
scrambled eggs
midday operas
soap popcorn
his smile said grandma.
Breakfast smells in his green room echo shuffling slippers
lying on linen lumpy as spring flower beds
exhaling once quietly no Argos feathers on you.
Dignity was falling in terror of the moss that loved you
parasites coming naturally.
The Marquee Lord of Slum
to make a tax shelter of your woodring memories.

You gave way to generational sense of imminent domain
this rotten stump on tub ring avenue was perfect posture
for a patch of ragweed wastrel
ants under a park trashcan
a dam to collect grime and used condoms
great lake of refuse
south of Ontario there is Pitt
place for polar suburban alchemy
our Mandala.
My first insight at our dogwood
great tree in the front yard,
useless shelter sleeve and leave less.
Elephant dreamer going to ground
a spinsters first love was foliage laden
where my story rang passionately intoning Icharus!
where bowling gnomes turned you gray
the very day we took root our growth stunted
a proposed limb turned callous.
Cheshire cat yowling in heat
pixie empress in a doorfame
foreign debtor claiming “Right of Discovery.”
This native took no trinkets
she left tail bristling swishing with life and dairy production
tabby paid half the rent.

Living in lab coats, tongues drenched in honeyed suggestion
our skinner box was baited
(flashing communication from a lamp post ass)
this boy is the space between you and the sky
clear in color residing only in welcome mats printed with Nihilism,
mouth full of prehensile smiles
a journey to conversation begins, cigarettes and sighs are light luggage.
Fingertips tease the oak guardian
tracing its screwdriver wounds,
he approaches the carbon fiber pedestrian predator
mounted on artificial equine highway is niche
eyes finger nails the only mar on a cloak of drapes
a blanket to hide the red window of his back.
I'll be more alive after an argument over coffee.
Maybe some tomatoes on wheat.

This is the place
hunger panacea, for wicka hospital style tiles
a dirty bathroom you don't despise
greasy aprons clean as honest labor
wisdom crinkles faces perched above Carhartt homes,
menus comprised of comfort foods
where the waterfall of a 4-way stop clamors silence
round about corner conversations.
Ashtrays are still a necessity here.
My jacket finds the chair to my right
I find a makeshift rocking chair against a sun warmed window
our hallowed embassy on neutral ground,
national relations over breakfast.
My wastrel flag is a plaid face under blue flannel
sans a calculated farce
I wait for the other tribes' elder.

Friends are seeds in the wind,
like me. They are geese and wildfires
a police force for our own pleasure.
It was a summer of guitars and sod blankets
slowly becoming a desert, a bed of sand
with concrete shorelines.

Winters and summers had strolled on
and I found myself on a peak
above green fields and capped airplanes.
Jimi! he would sign the walls
and our hearts with his singeing revolution,
his strings were flags in the wind
within the tunnels of limbs
budding ears and warm journal caskets
for all of us to remember.
A woman would sit on the rock in the evening.
She was the smell of rain
just before the pounce.
She wrinkled my brain with soft fingers
for years.
She was all the Zeppelin ever lacked.
I met a man on the square one evening.
His hands were a metal-gray
and his hair was matted like husks
and his skin was like the finish on an old violin.
Seeds were under his feet,
and his skin, rough
like grain hiding in their coffins.
Seeds are planted and replanted
in a wealth of wild growth,
the mothers and fathers of advancing intellect
in the midst of petty pushers.

There is a forest of tables
and walls of grass, where aprons
swing from side to side in our smoke
pouring from our lungs like clouds of our souls.
It is a meadow hidden in a cupboard
of grease and locust.
A lover stood me up here once.
I never sat in the nonsmoking again.
The old rust-stained sign, bravely smiled
maroon for us on cold afternoons,
a symbol for this town
of collegiate tree bark.
I molded into these walls and windows, 
an everyday cup for coffee. 
A good place to crawl along the spine 
of these worlds of ours.

Preliminary niceties are unnecessary here 
no mechanical gestures from flailing rod iron mannequins 
the retailers passion is our skin color 
yet here we sell nothing. 
How good it is to see another warm canine face 
wigless heads shaved faces without war paint 
as modern primitives 
let us count cu on our great enemy, reality.

I feel like my father when I come here 
in the morning. 
He's done this for sixty years. 
This fort hides us from the forked tongues 
of our lovers, and the singeing sting 
of the ashes hiding in the wind. 
This town is a cancer patient on sick leave.

Family causes post mortem knee jerks 
a communal effort erecting barriers at birth 
our family of twins with opposite postures 
were with me in wanton ritual be early lamp lit dusk 
at each gathering mutual unmentionable acquaintances 
frolic. 
Sydney, Mother Superior green bearer of gods son 
trip diethyl, and all our star faring prophets. 
These minds are cattle print 
and tonight my mind will be a grill. 
Come feast.

The hydrant lost its luster 
for the dogs, long ago. 
As these stations of crickets evolve 
they breed new faces, marked and teased, 

the wind hammering our backs. 
This is the last lagoon 
to wash your feet in 
as stories play in the fireplace, 
a family tree mountain range. 

Speak of tails as if we weren't wearing 
these 
ponds we cultivated for croaking 
my lilies? quite quiet 
padded and gagged to rest their eight track voices 
or my drooping cartilage cracks 
your fair fairing fairly, 
I watch infatuated with our angled mirror-backed terrariums. 
How is your no blood family?

Face paint is still thick 
on the surface of many, 
but inkwells still pool just the same. 
I tend a wood grain garden 
of church-hand handshakes and prismatic embrace, 
a harbor of nestling walls. 
Streetlamps fondle the fastening shoreline. 

Our thespians 
yowling Cheshire seamstress 
gone leaving bills and omens 
a boy stuffed with straw 
my spring wind contractor 
Sanguine daughters of Elizabeth 
You brought your town to my kitchen 
Folgers cans with liberty spikes 
Gemini roommates, tuskless walrus and carrion boy. 
Marcum never did clean up that dog shit 
with floors upholstered in learned vomit 
a room where only sty could rest 
green flies thought our porcelain god was vile 
as overconfident conductor of affairs. 
My conflict dressed as a Buddhist
led me to self ire nightly
regenerating each noon
from a dark yesterday now an antique.

These monuments are paper
and card-solved riddles in a shade of beige.
I am a spider web in your hallway, friend.
But my KGB notebooks brook
these streets with soluble bloodletter mandates
that wrap over wrists like glass reflections
of a fingernail’s chromatography-
slow, and detailed like mounds of ash
hidden in a deep Petri dish.
A grocery of snarling beards
and Scottish red-hand autonomy,
scars and epitaphs of your young hometown photography,
share and dwell these levels of an inland symphony.

Endless stonework
the labyrinth social vines inching from hole green hands
in lieu of memory. Hindsight granted from albums of instances
places festivals of six senses
people women men lovers friends full expression, antonym
synonyms
movement told of our demeanor
so we chose to dance
no rain came
sporting feathers around a pit in flames.
Teleported, transubstantiated
two boys now wanderlust gods
remnants of cocoon clinging for our dear life.
To Asheville we post marked our feet
heads in envelopes
from the static
only a sense of lingering fear from seas of semis
Red roofed sanctuary
doing that first moronic action with a firecracker
bent kneed grasseater using his legs as a violin.
Jimmy echoes in my head

that was barbarically pointless
but you and I smiling in a parking lot
giggling at under sighted admonishments
from friends with padre stances
arms crossed eyes stern
vagabond in green sneakers
railroad tramp and hoary gray beard
mountains in our eyes
Eve and Alice in our hearts
ashes are snow on a porcelain plateau.
Murray’s is our embassy.
But do you remember our country of origin?

We walked these cobble streetstones
in softened moss evening, tailoring
to our lungs
speech handshaking our roads and cotton-clad gardens
like where weatherfront mountainsides are tilled into the Earth.
We were royal condensation among collegiate foliage
and other brotherly keys spaced out evenly in our walls.

We led a wagon train
wistfully through countryside spaceports,
travelers with light nipping their heels-
in an instant, marked on the glass in our words.
We traveled like turtles in the wind,
haste brown and light
deep in cups and their stomachs.
They left their shells
at Imperial doorstep glaciers
where seeds seep their stinging muscles through the stone
like teepees of kindling in budding Kudzu.
Sometimes I dream in German subtitles, my mind’s end-of-day cognitive breakdown, a mishmash of places, people, and moments shuffled, manifest as a domestic foreign film, composed in an English-speaking brain impeccably fluent in German as long as it’s 2 AM and I lie unconscious, unwitting writer and director in a language whose surface I have barely breached.

Characters from the daytime—professors, parents, friends—regulars in the ongoing serial are edited into Einstein’s thesis, antithesis make synthesis with the Expressionistic black and white lighting and backdrops of Wiene’s Caligari, juxtaposed to snippets of Fassbinder’s theatrically-inspired staging of his stars in saturated seventies technicolor.

Kracauer’s stationary camera takes hold to present realism in the reality of characters speaking a language they don’t know in waking life. Bazin’s lens sets the image in deep focus, acute visual clarity counterbalancing garbled verbal exchanges enhanced with projected words that maybe, maybe not confer the meaning of speech.

My dissonant English-German conglomeration flickers in the deep movie house recesses situated somewhere in the vacant spaces of my cerebrum.

I’m sitting under the back row under the projection light, Cesare the somnambulist awakening with deep-set blackened eyes as people on screen morph into elongated Nosferatus and Fritz Lang’s human-like machines just as the Frauenfilme heroine of von Trotta fame is dissected in extreme close-up.

I’m left with the ambiguous Tom Tykwer ending, a silent exchange of myself leaving myself behind on the side of an interstate highway while red-haired Lola (who’s now blonde) takes off in the car with my other half instead of running, and the movie screen cuts to black.
for some time now she hasn’t remembered time now she hasn’t remembered my name she hasn’t remembered my name Cara? bewilderment. Rose? my name Cara? bewilderment. Rose? Christine? Mary? Cara? bewilderment. Rose? Christine? Mary? she thinks that Christine? Mary? she thinks that sterile she thinks that sterile (godforsaken)room sterile (godforsaken)room is the one room school house (godforsaken)room is the one room school house the nurses print well is the one room school house the nurses print well at their age, the nurses print at their age in a way their age in a way introductions do sound like roll call
in a way
introductions do sound like roll call
with the name guess games
introductions do sound like roll call
with the name guess games
every visit.
with the name guess games
every visit.
  her confusion
every visit
  her confusion  lost
  her confusion  lost
  her personality!  lost
  her personality!
somewhere under the thinning grays
  her personality!
somewhere under the thinning grays
  it was more AND more
  somewhere under the thinning grays
  it was more AND more
  it was more AND more
  Quiet there.
paralleling a no-noise
  Quiet there.
paralleling a no-noise
  but-shoes-to-floor-noise
paralleling a no-noise
  but-shoes-to-floor-noise
milling-around-shoes of a funeral visitation
  but shoes-to-floor-noise
milling-around-shoes of a funeral visitation
  for a real dead person
milling-around-shoes of a funeral visitation
  for a real dead person

its sick
for a real dead person
its sick
I mourned early
its sick
I mourned early
then the spill
I mourned early
then the spill
of mashy peas on her gown
of mashy peas on her gown
eye contact, not quiet...
gulp...reaction:

"Don't look at me."
eye contact not quiet...
gulp...reaction:
"Don't look at me."

Eye contact not quiet...
gulp...reaction:
"Don't look at me."

Her shame meant clarity. (Embarrassment)

"Don't look at me."
Her shame meant clarity. (Embarrassment.)

Shame on me.
Her shame meant clarity.
Shame on me.
Shame on me.
Shame on me.
Shame on me.
When You Drink With the Devil, You Drink Alone
Bianca Spriggs

The Pinot vine is described as "genetically unstable," meaning that it mutates very easily, which makes consistency from this vine extremely difficult.

I'm beginning to believe it's nigh impossible to find Pinot Devil twice. I've only seen it an actual bottle once, and I'm pretty certain this second time, when I order it from a menu, the server, a non-committal blonde with water stains on her glasses, has been told to dilute it or give us a substitute. There is no clung to the glass. No buxom aroma. It is as transparent as red mouthwash and tastes about as good. The friend I am with eyes me dubiously over her own glass. She doesn't believe my hype and thinks this so-called Devil is just a myth.

The flavor of Pinot Noir is chameleon-like. As these wines mature, they display a variety of complex characteristics including chocolate, game, figs, smokiness, truffles, and violets.

Flash of dark hair, high cheekbones, poreless skin a flurry behind the bar. A European accent. Sheer black blouse. A directness. An offer. Tilted black eyes. Too-red lips. One glass. And only another if she promises to stick her pinky in it, I tell her. Both of us laugh, with she laughing the longer. The heady hint of berries, clove, and smoke mingle with the glimmering liquid and her promise that I'll get home eventually. Home isn't the hour plus drive ahead of me, I tell her. I am beginning to suspect home is really on some island in a bungalow with blue walls and mango juice running down my arm. Home is being nearly addled with sun and scent and salt. Home is next to someone who lives in my periphery. She says she can get me there, too.

Pinot Noir is described as "the most romantic of wines, with so voluptuous a perfume, so sweet an edge, and so powerful a punch that, like falling in love, they make the blood run hot and the soul wax embarrassingly poetic."

"You will come for drinks when I close, yes?"
"It's late. I have to work tomorrow all the way in Bowling Green."
"It's okay, it's okay. I will make sure you get there in the morning."
"I shouldn't. I'm sorry."
"What’s your name? Will you come to my other bar this weekend?"

The tremendously broad range of bouquets, flavors, textures and impressions that Pinot Noir can produce sometimes confuses tasters.

Something is bothering me. Despite the dim of the wine bar, light surfaces everywhere. Light gleams from the orifices of mirrors behind the bar reflecting lamps. Light stutters over the gems on my left ring finger. Puddles of light ooze over each round, black table. Even though I am sure it is there because it would have to be, wouldn’t it? I can’t see any light reflected in her eyes. Her eyes are swallowing it all.