

The Cracked Green Door

Also by Aaron Quinn

Stars Below the Concrete

The Cracked Green Door

A Southern Poetry Collection

AARON QUINN



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To all the shadows hiding in this book, thank you.

why i

Why do we write?
We write for the skin-torn survivor of
Americans that lost hope.
The half-alive roaches crawling along chipped,
clear ashtrays and fingernails.

to doubt, divine

Baby worlds birth in my words,
then collapse in joyous lack of understanding.
I am a ghost; society bends around—
Lord, I believe; let me hold on to my unbelief.

To doubt, divine, to not know so unAmerican.
If I believe, will you let me doubt more?

The walls are black. I see every imperfection:
they are me - made in YOUR image, are they you?
If Jesus made me see, why do I still feel blind?

Pastor knows all, but Jesus wept just like me.
Does the Cross's prism reveal tears or certainty?
Love is patient— patient in obedience? patient in
questioning?— Light can only flicker when the wick is strong.

I swallow life immediately, waiting
for a river of knowing to consume.
Jesus walks on water with empty grave eyes
and take this cup understanding inviting me into
his patient divinity.

To know, American. To doubt, divine.

Widows weeping, fatherless seeking create Eden in
the evening of our discontent as night's
smiling moon declares Christ's cross doubting divinity
births humanity
inside unAmerican weakness.

hands of gods

Back where the pines rained sap
and the rain brought manna,
there was room for the grasshopper
and fluttering wings of the June Bug.
The moonshine flowed before it was legal
and fried okra stayed hot on the stove
after all the hands were washed.

The kids ran without shoes,
papa shot the gun in the hayfield,
and boys chased the girls for fun.

Bright candy red tomatoes big enough to fit in
the hands of gods gushed during sticky summer nights
while the grasshopper jumped in the overgrown grass.

Time slowed back where the pines rain sap
and the words were slower while the lake rippled waves
that carried the sons and daughters into the July
afternoons.

dove

The jagged slopes of Signal Mountain expand through an unfettered bond of silence.

A monotonous-green shades the rays of sun.

The river divides, and the dove dives down into a pine-needled ground

as the monolithic expanse of the sky purges the abyss of the bustling work week.

My Lord confirms his covenant

when the dove dives down into my heart.

bubble gum machines, lost things

I did it so well under the staring eyes of the greying skies.
Faster, faster, I always ran faster:
never knowing if I ran to or away.

I did it so well, hidden under
the bubble gum-dropping machines and daydreams of
cracking lost things. Faster, faster—
“boy, you have to run faster if you want to make the team.”

I did it so well, always limping deadweight footed back to
the cliff of no return where I could look
at the world everyone else knew.

I did it so well, drowning while trying to live
while trying to drown—
heavy-handed gods of walked-away parents
pushed me under the water.

Faster, faster—
their goodbyes never went away when I ran faster.

I did it so well, swallowing the ocean to
take a drink of life- sprawled on my back
to watch the grey invade the indigo-pinkening sky.

Drown once, drown twice-
If Christ only resurrected once, how many more can I?

as the same

Tangled limbs of lovers,
branches scratching against the window. Sleep is ruthless
now that winter is here.

When the lights come on, she asks how will they stay.
I only know how to think with a pen.

She speaks as though we are one, but she was never
created as me. She was created as human.
I was created as a ...

Her words bring life, mine bring death
until the witching hour comes to accept my red eyes and
the irritation of my conscious stream.

Elephants stomp the leaves they pass; dried rose petals
crumble when touched—
the oil from fingers leaves traces that she is here.
Where am I?

Dried limbs burn bright orange: clinched fist talks, peony
vases will soon need to be filled.
Bitter breath and wide-eyed
we are anonyms deconstructing butchered hymns.

Together we draw near as the
creaking house settles under winter's curtain,
propping up our confused confession
that she was created as human, but I was created as a ...

jesus the magic man

In a flame of glory, we were driven mad:
mad by blindness, mad by lust.

Round and round we go,
this world was never our own.

Insomnia crept into
Our Father who art in Heaven, Hallow be thy name.

Henna drawings of punch-drunk luck
inspired our bonfire fairytales.

Addicted to black coffee café mornings,
prayer-popping mama is afraid
when we smell like the night before.

We were birthed onto
a merry-go-round that has spun off the wheel.

Ratted and tatted,
we are shamans and witch doctors: puppets playing
hallelujah choruses to Jesus, the Magic Man.
The Sandman guides the way while we search
for a land made for madmen.

no sir, i do not want a bagel

She walked into the coffee shop kicking the carpet:
door jammed.

Passive kick as she walked by: door left open-
carpet folded over

Man stepped over the carpet, looked down, looked up:
door staring at the street.

Person on couch stood,
walked over, smoothed carpet flat:
door shut properly
while the one before ordered her bagel, texting on a phone.

Justice lays like the carpet: Will I order the bagel?

OR

Will I stand?

american spirits

The brittle pages crumble:
a reminder of those days
that were only given tossed-away thoughts.

Time was a fat bottom girl
that swayed under the half-lit streetlight before curfew,
called youth back home.

The days burnt away while life was pinched off
by time's withering fingers
and parceled out as though there was not enough.

Constructed, chiseled, whittled down, time reminds,
tangles, binds
then cackles anew with strange faces, unopened boxes of
American Spirits, and aspirations that are dimly lit

drifter

The drifter slides down the spine of life,
knifing through normalcy,
like wood floating down white crested rivers.

Go, the heart must always go, grating under
the umbrage of stay,
no umbrella is needed on a rainy night—
the drifter must feel the rain
while their feet are healed by the night.

Run to the west young one;
the sun will meet your heart.
Bloodshot eyes will create the
reality that stands to salute the drifter's heart.

Drown alone, drown under the tide of the blood-moons that
move with the windshield as Tennessee tobacco fields fade
into the purgatory of Kansas flatland.

God's testimony awaits
for the drifter's foot to kiss the dirt.

Another sun, another floating cloud,
all a coalescing of a heart that drifts and dances with
the yellow lines while holding the eyes of the stranger
passing a smoke until another bowl fades
as the Drifter's Anthem cries:

*I must go,
go until the world turns flat.*

the birds and the bees

I like hearing the humming of the birds
and buzzing of the bees inside the bushes,
while watching downtown buses and the beggars.

The birds chirp, the bees bat their wings
in-between the cathedrals of government buildings.

To hear, I must be silent, must be still.
The change in my pocket must stop clanging
if I am to hear the humming of the birds.

ginsberg style, pop-rock diction

We walk on paved paths even though the names of those
who built them are unknown. The cars cost more than the
shoes on our feet, but we have the freedom to turn
down one-way streets. We decided to write but wanted to
forget the editor, wanted to rhyme but forgot the lyrics,
wanted to paint but had no canvas, and wanted to color
but had no lines for the crayon. Ginsberg style with pop-
rock diction, we thought we were superstars without the
show, actors without the scripts, flipping rocks after the
steaks were cooked pinked and the potatoes were mashed
in the sink. We were all together but never around each
other; we were holding hands without ever touching,
praying without saying the Catechism,
The Dubliners told us fifteen ways of humanity,
whether it was James or Joyce, the male and female no
longer mattered as long as pockets were not empty and the
bed was occupied by someone that could arouse.
We were uneducated by teachers but learned from the torn
pants of the homeless man eating the
scraps we threw away.

If outlines were supposed to lead, we forgot. Only
ripped-up wedding vows and cradles abandoned led us to
the point where the moon faded and the sun warmed.
My generation's cross was a road where one direction led
to prosperity, and one led to obscurity but both led to
individualism. Our parents wanted the retirement plan and
the Pearly Gates to open because of their piety but we
wanted to walk down the paved paths to understand life
was something to live for not die because OF.

unity

An acorn, shaken from the branch, rambles on about life from evolution to execution. The silent acorn speaks with a subtle wisp, then rots and unifies with the earth.

petal beauty

If I see the color of the flower petals
let me see the diverse rainbow on another's cheek-
beauty is ubiquitous and remains just as time
until we last close our eyes.

pigtailed smile

Poverty is the plum souring, staining the
pigtailed girl's hands:
pushed away from Christmas-tree-lights
to stand by trashcan fires on public streets.
Her pre-pubescent face in a clean but donated shirt, with
dirty nails: The bathrooms closed at night.

Nestled on 11th street, poverty is isolated,
standing by suits on sidewalks while wearing
donated shoes: holes in the socks.

Poverty is near, propped up for Thanksgiving volunteers,
but inescapable for the pigtailed smile,
squatting by light before the shelter goes dark for the night.

our feet are healed by the night

Silent faces of friends depict
the angst of ill-timed platitudes—
pleasantries from misunderstood partners
and eschewed wisdom.

The weeds coming from the concrete
were our partners on the street.

Our feet are healed by the night.

We tried to listen,
to listen to the words given
by prophets that pass the plates
but ignore the widow.

Was life supposed to be an enemy
or manna dripping from heaven's door?
Kerouac, please ease my mind,
send me on the road
with quarters clinging in my pockets and
ill-timed platitudes in my pen before
I flip another of these burgers.

They took my clean clothes and referred to me as boy
but never read the prose or lines languishing in my backpack.

Travels with Charlie in tow,
my feet were healed by the night
and lost under the dimming light.

Save me a place there,

there where you stop speaking.

Down the coast and in Carolina,
under the pink moon,
we had our feet cooled by changing tides.

Seashells in the calloused palms
of a generation deemed a mistake—
results of too much consumption
or not enough protection:
my people were born and given their message.
With binoculars, watch as we sway
to the muses of angels after
we make friends during last call.

Cleveland taught me to taunt my ignorance
and bad dates taunted my arrogance
all the while my tapping keys
kept me going on unfamiliar paths.

Society long ago washed their hands
and kicked the dust on my shoes— on our shoes—
when they heard us proclaiming that our feet are healed by
the night.

They rest on ideas formed
by the river where they once prayed. We rest on the books
they banned and the prayers we still pray.

Kerouac, ease our tired minds
until the jalopy takes us up the mountain
so our feet can be healed by the night.

the owl hides

He hides in the day. Like an owl.
When the streets are clear, he calls himself Columbus. The
night he buys with his cardboard boxes.
His name is Ike,
or Mark, it changes every year.

His weathered wallet is devoid of anything accept one
fading picture:
him with a giggling pigtailed girl.
The sun comes: Mark dissipates into the trees. His night
will soon come.

why ii

We write for the casket left open after the bullet tore
another son. The hitched thumb of the Fifties: generation
of spirit.

Since: are we free?

this is home

There are holes in tin roofs and
rusted fixer-uppers parked on overgrown lawns.
Stay or go begins to till up the suffocation
that will come before the weekend is over.
Boredom contorts its fat fingers
around the overeager thought process.

Even though stars are whittled thin
and the moon is too big to grab with
the hand there is no room for the imagination
to expand while looking down on Poor Valley.

The speckled jacket on the fall trees
wanted to control the mind like a good woman
with a stout chest and a firm hand
but the bickering between growth
and regression tore imagination and familial
rest asunder until the diesel engine could hop over potholes
while passing the doublewides and double lines
that would give way to four lanes and named streets.

eyeliner

Today, markings of good— never great, but at least good.
No shouts, nor angry tones,
just soft looks and gentles yeses:
the top remained on the bottle.
He went to sleep.
Your strawberry scent came out of the shower,
I sat in silence for the entire hour.
I thank you for simply being.
You walk with the towel around your hair,
never caring about the commotion,
but emotion long has been your enemy.
All-consuming fire: God or addiction?
I never wanted to lose us,
but never realized that attaining was the difficulty.
An expanding nature of being content,
only for the nights with natural sleep: stop.
It is the silence again as you apply eyeliner.
No cries, no yells, just us being.
The washer finished its spin.
My head wrapped around the warping of us.
Unified in the silence,
petrified by the impending separation:
Can we steal one more day?

swing higher, dreamer

Tisk, tisk it was all amidst.
brisk days and flighty ways
parlayed the rotting of Muses.
Fresh squeezed oranges
brought forth spoiled juice.
We sat on the shores;
you skipped those rocks,
though they always sunk.
The melancholic tide tore us into
a picturesque madness.
Such an intrepid intermingling,
an offspring of psychosis,
brought empty vodka bottles
and wiped away Cinderella.
Our immanence tarnished transcendence.
We could never stop the wheel,
grinding gears and passing years
taught truncated stories words never meant for now.
Ecce! Ecce! Cupid is wounded.
The tomb opens its lips;
cackles and sneers come forth.
Burnt meals and mixed perfumes
once asked for forgiveness,
now they negate the hellos.
Such is a life learned from parents,
but babe, we stand between lines.

Fold your clothes,
be careful, for the night is convening.
I will blow that horn; you will lock that door.

The never fading Northern Star will lead.
Through untouched yellow lines and
with cold cups of coffee,
we will learn new words,
allowing for modern fairy tales.
Wishing wells will have ripples
as you skip your stones.
The yellow lights go off
to illuminate the yellow skylight.
I wish I may; I wish I might
comes to fruition through patience.
So, swing a little higher, dreamer:
because, babe, we stand in-between lines

sometimes three

There are two, sometimes three.

A kaleidoscope reality-
rush of thoughts,
conflict of emotions.

Treetop highs, followed by avalanche lows:
where the sun shines an eclipse always comes

There are always two, sometimes three
in the spring as the blue jay sings.

I am to love, to commit-
inside the cracked glass prism of conflict.

My hands held hers to say I do-
clarity in vows, confusion in the tomorrow.

There will always be two inside,
sometimes three- praying to be one:

One inside.

One with her.

While hoping three will not turn into four.

There are two, sometimes three -
before and after.

she doesn't know her name is suzy

The day has gone: it started here.

By god, I will drink their last pot of coffee:

The paint is moving, the caffeine is good.

Each person in line has been known to me.

Calculated glimpses allowed me to form their narrative.

How can it be? I know everything but their name?

love was to lose

I had thought to love was to lose:
a thunderous vacuum created
by the cistern of loss following
the inception of love's honeysuckle sweetness.

If the dogwoods bloomed,
I was to hear her tale of their smell.
Moon-struck luck laced
the thread of love's garment when new,
but old wine skins break the vase
that hold the wilted petals of her roses.

I thought to love was to lose
until I lost it all at the altar with an I do.
As a seed dies, then the bud blooms.
I saw to lose was to die,
and to die was to live when I heard her say I do.

lent

The wind, whipping angrily,
called to the crevices of my soul.

It ignored my mangled, malice heart,
giving me the scent of dogwood.

My soul sat with the wind howling,
asking for the silence of obedience.

I gave garnished words from my heart,
willingly garnering my own respect.

The wind ceased. My soul wept.
All was silent, even my stout tongue.

cracked green door

Sitting even with the cracked green door
that led to Chattanooga streets,
I saw the short-shorts girls riding high handlebar bikes.
Pedaling with toeless Chaco-covered feet,
they obscured the polka-dot blue wall
in the lot across the street.

A fedora-hat boy blocked the green vine
that slunk down the blue wall. Early for his meeting,
he tapped on the table with his fingers until
a suit and tie-wearing wallet sat down.

Fedora wanted a different view of Chattanooga-
Tax-skirting musician using a non-profit
to pedal thousands toward a new project:

*Better invest more, son,
the percussion is tight, the girls' legs are tighter,
the high kicks bring light, and the music fights for the cause.*

The cracked green door with refurbished wood
and a sanded surface was cracked just enough to see
the whistling Wyoming tags
on the streets of sunny Chattanooga.

A man in flannel hated
Kill Bill-style guitar recordings: bearded,
Wal-Mart shoe-wearing, and
analog-loving production addict.
The horns of the band he
listens to break all the rules of the genre:
his spirit is weak, but his flesh is willing to do what it takes

to make that new track that pays the next bill.

The leader of marching ants
walked down the streets with his red sign:
Jesus is coming soon.

A white-sweater-wearing girl with manicured nails,
and thrift-store jeans puffed smoke.
She sat down, blocking the door:
her leather boots had new thrashes on the skin.
She was to the right, sitting even with the door,
on a cracked, blue-painted metal bench.
She watched the cars palpitate down Chattanooga streets.

When the white sweater left, I stayed,
sitting even with the cracked green door
until my cup was empty, and it was time to go into those
streets to converge with the pulse of Chattanooga's vein.

cooled embers

Maybe it will be next September
when we dance
with the rain:

the chimes of the bell at noon will remind why we
hopscotch and skip rocks.

This town threatens to mousetrap our minds.
I watch you stop, then start
afraid that the fire will die in your eyes.

Clap then go,
your journal never found a
cage it did not like.

Under train tracks, we were disguised
as a sunrise hidden from sight.

We ignored our past until
we were running over cooled embers.

Now we have to admit that
we are exactly what we seem to be:

Imaginary wanders looking for another shadow to jump.

where have you gone

Iron fist – first-time bliss, regression of freedom:
Where have you gone?
The bed brought sonnets,
decadence of desire demeans.
Hollow were your ways.
An abyss of mental torment– sorry never spoken.
You yelled. I pleaded: Where have you gone?
Get out! Get out!
You exile the exasperated– Please, God, I beg.
Car full of flung-through clothes,
empty boxes broken down– drown, damn it!
In your depression, you demand to drown.
Drips of reverberation linger,
only absence abides by my side.
Sit! Sit! let us talk one more time.
Where have you gone?
Jot down the dreary stupor,
signifier of darkness looming.
You long to be free, but swallow your sentence.
Where have you gone?
The past behooves you to damnation.
Instead, I am the damned.
The medicine mixes emotions,
gleaning the dross of fickle pleas
then you succumb to the delusion.
I bow to beg: Darling, dance in my security.
Where have you gone?

new country roads took me home

Ducks waddling by weathered posts.
Pink lemonade-colored sunsets.
Days inch by, threatening never to end.
Choices made, choices for front porch
waving to strangers that are now neighbors.
Tension between streetlight midnights and choices made.
A soul divided. A soul united.
Tension between sky-blocking buildings
and vast subsidized cornfields.
Heart in one, heart in both, heart in none.
A mind divided refuses to stand,
but a mind united through tension
never forgets bridge walking conversations
while looking at deer prints in the mud.

capote and flat sprite

I stirred from too many dreams
and told too many lies just to make you cry.
It is time to grow up and admit my wrongs, if only
for the sake of moving on.
Where light shone, there is gray.
Moments of affinity evolved into tragedy.
Questions of how can we turned into why should we?
I held your sweaty hand as we walked downtown,
cracked sidewalks our companion.
The night air aerated aggravation, and passing lights
created shadows never leading to that new way:
you could never be the one.
Sybil thoughts and pale regrets rescue pilfering smiles.
Life was worn until the jeans faded,
but the pants became too big.
Breakfast at Tiffany's plays, and Capote sits on the table
as the record skips in lazy humidity.
The sprite has gone flat,
but I drink to your lingering memory only to replay
another wrong inside thinning fog and shivering words.

why iii

We write for the empty pews, sermons of sulking moods.
The melting pot has boiled over – pleading and protesting
for a new beginning.

foreign fields

I could breathe until you pulled in.
By the end of coffee and awkwardness,
your hips held my attention even while you spoke of foreign
fields. You tried to play the mandolin but put it down since
it was out of tune: my deaf ears only heard your smile.

All the daguerreotypes of past mores that schooled me in
stout dreams were accosted by you across the booth.
Each moment felt like props destined to be blown over by
seduction's hot air. A ruthless happiness seemed stale in our
eyes as if it was to perish precipitously as we spoke.
Did you see my surety freeze when
you laughed for all the shop
to hear? I watched your hands fidget.

My ice melted; your cup emptied
as my eyes consumed every time
your eyes flashed happiness.
Only we sat across from each other
but each past sat sardonically to our left,

You pushed against the night, standing beside your car.
I wondered if our rhetoric had toed the line of seduction.
My hands moved down the side of your shirt.

If you had never come three moons ago
maybe I would not have stood under that moon with your
hips holding my mind still.
I never looked back, believing that now would never leave,
if I remembered the echoes of foreign fields.

cankerworms and locust

Chattanooga River bends,
splitting North Shore and the police precinct.
It rambles, mazing through the divide,
connected by Walnut Street walking bridge.
The cankerworms and locust of past/present tension
rolls with the fog over the water on winter mornings
exposing the bust of OUR growing city.

cucumber sandwiches

We ran through our dreams after leaving your mom's house
I tried to draw stick figures of the future,
Even though I looked through a cloudy glass.
The grey clouds rushed back east.
We ate cucumber sandwiches you fixed
as we questioned where we were.
I asked if you ever felt the rain.
The whooping wind forged your fear.
I snickered as you grabbed my arm—
the breeze was cold, but the seas never let us go.
You hated the rain.
Then we danced even though we forgot our jackets.
Neither of us liked heights, but we sure did climb. to watch
the sun run from the water.
Withering moments and
exasperated credit cards challenged our yesterday.
I whispered I am the now.
It was your motif to ask how,
but I was just the now.
The thought of mortality always made your arms itch,
but I showed my scars;
proof of my immortality.
Then you pointed at the moon and said:
baby, look, death occurs every day.

if you watch, you will see me trip

We tended to sprawl on our backs,
allowing the Ocoee's ripples to wipe the sweat off our brows
while we neglected to mention all the pebbles
from discontent that dug deep in our feet
when we walked aimlessly around the house.
Though both slid shoes on,
similitude never stitched our tainted view.
Irritations fueled the wars started from little slits
made from love before.
With vigor, our consciences were seared with suspicions.
But pride became our treasured diadem allowing for folly
kisses on the forehead.
Rungs of ruin were in the filtered
light of day that peaked through the closed blinds.
The hide placing tried to allow us to forget the impending
dark that crept up our arms,
but hiding threatened to tell the truths we avoided so well.
Caught in a maze designed by those who viciously denied
who we could have been,
the gate to our Canaan was hidden by yesterday's fog.
When plain sight was seen, we tiptoed around
until I left for work, and you went to the medicine cabinet.
When sobriety was pure, countryside drives unfurled
until slumber came.
You had to be mother –
Mother Mary or the mother lost.
I needed to be the shadow of those
who damaged you before:
shadow of hope or
shadow of doubt,

the shadow kept you hidden.

For unknown reasons, neither of us wanted either to be the now: the present was our begged-for curse.

We tried to blockade moments with presents,
but the blood would never drip out of our eyes.
Revenge for those before came with every stab
we made with crystal-laced tongues.

If the present was our agency
movies to watch and hands conjoined
in park-walk-Sundays would have
been the vows we spoke,
and sins committed in attempts to feel healed would have
been washed by the water
as the ripples of the Ocoee cooled our brow.

tarry

Death draws near every waking day.
Constant cold shots of whiskey never
whisk death's gentle nudge.
Crow another day young roosters,
for I want death to tarry
if my heart is its one desire.

pennies wasted

Pennies wasted and wasted nights
unfurl where flocks of seagulls lead to the sea
and no priests give sacramental thoughts.

Jesus's body, dirty sandals, and bloody thoughts
stitch the seams of the journals
that forgot to mention church choirs and
Easter-dress-repentance.

Give us this day our daily bread—
Father, forgive us, for we know exactly what we do.
Prayer closets and secret relationship closets
were the same for Southern Epicurean Christianity.

Pennies wasted and wasted nights
were closer than the preachers
in a time where hymnal-Sundays lost the words:
no longer hymning up pennies wasted and wasted nights.

stray man

The still street salutes the stray man,
who walks the labyrinth of unnamed lanes
that lead beyond the yawn of sleepy Tennessee.
At night, double yellow lines row his heart ashore.
A devil in Georgia, a saint in St. Louis,
no one will tell him not to dance
when the still street salutes the stray man.

gawking darkness

First impressions brought first-time love.
You never wanted the dust to build.
The curtains blew in our faces,
I could smell the fabric softener,
the one I told you I hated—
it was always your favorite.

We played Red Rover in the park
wearing clothes that did not fit,
you took offense to the tight jeans
and I took long looks as you walked—
neither of us turned the lights on,
our nakedness was unwelcomed.
I carefully crafted out hopes of better days.
Past disasters taught you vengeance,
anger made me the villain.
Still, every sonnet spoke of us slyly.
I mumbled 130 as you yelled
but kissed your cheek before bed.

We always needed each other
developing the pedagogy of prolonging.
Goodbye stalked the frame.
My smile left, and yours went crooked.
Still, we kept gawking at the darkness,
knowing that the lies in our eyes
could not be seen if we did not look.

waves of depression

Waves of depression:
ripples of fault,
fault lines of emotions shaken.

Maker then Master
then, when troughs of black thoughts cease, Father:

Where are the eagle wings?

Flesh of my flesh:
My flesh,
her flesh,
our flesh.
Whose left
when my prayers no longer show
the imprints of waterfalls?

mitchell, i never thanked you

Between heartache and the need for a gentle sunrise,
you offered your floor and a too-short blanket.
The movie stopped, and she fell asleep beside you.
Whiskey provoked you to blast the air conditioner
after the sweat of your glass dried.
Pushed out of home by my she,
your floor formed my island of retreat,
but her taste seemed like an eternal stain on my tongue.
I pulled the blanket up to my chin,
and my feet became uncovered.
My head lay on the pillow until the tiny triangle kicked out,
causing my cheek to fall onto your carpet.
Sleep alluded, bullied away by memories
you begged me to forget.
That night when all changed,
and the blanket could not cover
the chill of your high-powered air conditioner,
was supposed to be about her
but it became about something more:
It became about you being a friend,
nothing complex, just a friend.

union avenue

On Union Avenue—
surrounded by raised flowerbeds
and refurbished everything—
I sit on gentrification's porch,
perched where poverty was birthed
but pushed out by frat houses and down-payment cars.
The men and women jog
with homeschooled kids riding bikes behind:
“Safe as safe can be, there is no one to catch me.”

Someone's prayers worked, heaven's leaking placenta was
dammed, the flood rains ceased —
doves dived through the pillowed clouds.
Autumn hues of damp leaves
warm the cold street sterilized by the police.
Before work, it is a black-coffee-poured-by-white-hands
type of afternoon: hipster patio, hastened day.

In unison, the words march forth.
The people talk traveling while tipping white mocha mugs,
breaking bread, dipping their thoughts in Mac books
and cheese platters.

Until my cup empties, I am them.
They are me- sideways mirrors distorting our image.
Then it is back to the shelter.
Toilet paper and G.E.D. study books will be given.
Post-college conversations will be replaced by those forced
to save up to buy the pen that signs their Section-8 voucher.

gettysburg

Whooping around, the gyre spins, sucking all in, forcing
black tar negativity to knife through our veins.

Divide, then divide again.

The gyre's sin is that
the soul of man is divided,
ensuring society does not stand as one.

Rocking cradle thoughts get lost
in the gyre, the soul of the country cankers
as the dam breaks,
turning the rancid babbling of the
gyre into a flood that covers Gettysburg.

two roads

The Hiwassee River divided two roads.

One was a paved path highway.

One was potted-holed and tattered.

One led home,

one led to the marooned peaks of the mountain.

One had heavy traffic,

one just had our white squeaking car.

The Hiwassee River divided two roads:

There were two people in the one car,

looking for only one river with one trail and one-way home.

community revitalization forgot about him

Businesses bubble over the Chattanooga skyscape
camouflaging the stars from coming cars:

Little star of Bethlehem, those lost in
Chattanooga-gunshot-dust wonder where you are.

Shards of light cover the man sleeping on shards of glass:
you should have gone west, young man,
where the dusty expanse envelopes the eloping soul.
Wanderlust lays in wait for those
whose soles meet the dusty bowl of the western light.

let's go to the river

Ghost white ducks doddle down
to the overgrown goblin pond: patches of algae,
piles of trash – left-hand tosses of the talisman.

Disseminated clouds cover the blinking blind eyes,
clovers stomped by confused boy:

Quirky notes cover epitaphs while brown rotten petals pass
the pithy days in gutted silence.

Plumb purple bruises covered by disturbed soil:
momma masquerades strength as grape size
tears tickle her chin.

In the whitewashed stone corner, a once-was-proud sister
wipes the leaves off a former honor roll daughter,
doting boyfriend drove too fast:
children should never play in traffic,
swerve to the corner,
life laments the speed of the shifting gears.

The night never kissed goodbye,
it was no gentleman: it was stiff-necked
and cold knuckled
confused about fate's decorum.

In-between poppa got drunk
and sister got sad,
the untouched money green grass sprouts:
its grotesque fingers slither on the tombstone.

tuesday morning solo coffee

Sheets of sun slice through Tuesday morning
carrying a gospel of good. Or maybe beauty?
Either way, the sun slices
remind that there is, and that which is, is something slinking
down the smile warmed by the slicing sun.
Wake, wake— it is time to wake;
nightmares are worse when I am awake.

A rotten cross and an empty grave
blow winds against the church bells
reminding of white hems singing ancient hymns.
Pierced-hand reality fights against
the demagoguery of the approaching night:
mental, physical, the dark saunters
in the peripheral, threatening Tuesday's slicing sun.

Stay the same, all must stay the same,
but the sun never stays in the same location
long enough to uncuff the darkness.

Come condemnation, come castration,
cut off the slicing sun's hope.
Not knowing — the damning.
The damning— the only known.
Graying skin, splintered thoughts,
the night's hiding hand slithers over surety.

Stay the same, same sound, same words;
all must stay the same—
swim deeper, nonsleeper,

drown in the depth of uncertainty.
Consistency was supposed to be a wishing well,
but drowning fits the mania better
than the slicing sun ever could.
The night cackles as the throat dries,
all lost, though nothing changed.
All forsaken, even though all remains.
The dove flew away –peace comes,
come, let us reason together.
The mind must now succumb to
the piercing wail of night's cackle while
Tuesday's slicing sun shines on my one mint green mug.

we waited

Two together, none beside,
we waited on a cliff
where the tops of the oaks were reachable.
The Lord had covered the land with solemn sublimity.
The fog rolled below; the speckled night sky was above
before morning dew could contaminate the dark.

Rain came, terroristic torrents.
The humidity mugged the July heat.
Sandwiched between up and down,
the green smelt crisp and current,
extenuating the current below.
We heard but did not see.

Falling was an obsession:
fall for the simplicity, fall down the cliff, or fall for the girl-
all must fall, but the poison was poured into different cups.
The rocks were chipped by the wind-
a bed for some, a ladder for others.

Up, arrested by ascent, we were waiting-
waiting for what was still to be defined.

Then we had to go down, down towards the menacing
ground and railroad tracks that lead away from the waiting.
Down, near the white crests of the folding river,
we could touch the ground that led us away,
but the away always led to an insomniac desire to come back,
back to where we were left waiting.

why iv

We write for the unchecked gluttonous stares toward
unsuspecting teen girls.
Bounty of hung dictators
that caused all of Momma's children
to float away, nameless, at sea.

birds sing

Chili-Mac dinner, spitting snow—
we halfway listened to Fear and Loathing thoughts
and Ted Hughes rhythms,
pretending we knew what it all meant.
Smoke breaks and late-night calls shattered your trance.

Your moleskin sat next to an untouched Diet Coke
as you told Ouija board tales and Wagon Wheel cords,
while the rest of Cleveland slept.

Those in the booth hung like puppets,
you gluttonously consumed the attention.
Back and forth,
the conversation swayed
under the guide of swapped-out stories.
Then you silenced all by asking:
When was the last time you stopped to hear the birds sing?

i thank, ye

I drank coffee from Peru while songs
inspired by folk music and folks
leaving were strummed and sung with
off-key perfection.
Each note birthed reflection of seconds
being parceled out by the greed of Father Time.

Traveling from Vermont, the boys sang,
sang as though they believed the words
written about a world I never walked through:
A world that surely passed me by
before the doctor could make my face swell with tears-
Call me Roland, I thank ye.

Those Northern boys were followed by
the chords of a Southern choirboy confused by
repentance and ambition served during a time of angst.
The cloudy presence of names forgotten started to fade.
I sat surrounded. I sat alone.

As those boys said their goodbyes,
I sat as though I was a shirt worn too long,
but too comfortable to simply throw out
and replace with new fabric.

bourbon-stained teeth

The smoke crawled up her arm— the night needed to be frail:
Roaches mixed with the smoke will stain the finger,
but the louder the laugh, the less the consequences of our
actions.

Silver cans, strangers, and Shakespeare
collide to create a chilly March night of hellos and moving
on: One will go out west.
For me, the storehouse of gathered
weeds starts to burn as the lighter is struck again.

Caramel-scented candles burned as the one in the purple
glasses spoke about the purple Bell Jar:
*our belief is a stout one tonight,
boy, are we all famous for the night, baby, and no amount of past due
bills and scars on our arms can say differently.*

To those taking our taxes, we were just the swine they threw
pearls to, but as we passed idle chatter around
there existed not a problem left unsolved:
lock, stock, and barrel we shot from the hip.
Everything mattered so much that nothing was important.
We changed the world— our world- with wisdom from the
streets and teeth cut under bourbon-stained teeth.

driven mad

We were driven mad, mad by blindness,
mad by lust,
driven mad beyond feeling.
Then mad dripped, dripped off the tongue.

All the commotion left us wanting more:
more tomorrow, more us.
But sorrow condemned, condemned us to wait.
On a whim, we went mad.
When you went home,
I went to Candies Creek,
the creeks you made at night followed me on the path.
Madness became a footprint, a hologram.

You beckoned the night to come softly
under the guise of protection.
All of it caused me to be driven mad,
driven mad to the point of clarity.

the new man moves

The toddler toddles-
freedom fans beauty his way, water awaits.
Worrying mom.
The new man moves.

Grass brushes the toddler's legs he distances himself
heroically— his innocence drives him away: The new man
moves.

Giggle, giggle, he goes—
the fence is too short,
under with unabated urges: the new man moves.

Oh, god, no,
the mom is mystified by fear.
Toddler frolicking free.
The new man moves.

Up above the rope, as the toddler objects,
instinct distains danger when
the new man moves.

Son is safe, mom breathes-
sensitivity restored.
She finds finished love after
the new man moves.

black lines, new strings

I am you,
yearning and lacking;
hoping while doubting the sunrise.
I recall too much,
only to not restlessly remember.
Ramifications of didactic moments make you a mirror:
a terrible infliction of scabs.

Black lines,
followed by new strings, tell one tale.

I muddled the seclusion— glasses half washed
and full-moon moods
beset me with changes never sought.
“Ick, Ick,”
and alabaster anguish
fall asleep next to the mirror.

You are
and I am you.

the road is my kingdom

When my foot met the pavement,
I chased her, I chased God.

Made to lust after wandering,
the nights creaked by,
the creeks ran cold, and the winter confounded.
But the roads still whined:
hollow winds, bellowed notes.

My mind itched, and my hands twitched.
The macadam back roads
and four-lane paths to glory
sung holy choruses to a pen that scribbled at night.
Unholy in the eyes of the robbed,
sanctified by bedside prayers,
I blaspheme the church
to construct heaven's path on the road:

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done.

Here is the placement of divinity:
the pebbles crunch
and the cats cry
as the miles churn.
My meandering soul
finds its suffering eased
by the etching of the sunlight
on the windshield marked by miles:
ricochet of colors, prism of refuge.
The four-way stop becomes a cross to bear.

harriet prays

The mighty Mississippi unfurls, winding to bind the south
and Midwest, forever tethered together.

Echoes of the chain gang sounds
as the bullets rip through a Charleston church:
divided, segregated-
the EMPTY GRAVE weeps.

Harriet prays for the country she led through the railroad.
Ransacked and ran over, her blight is soon forgotten when
HUMANS cannot stand together.

As the fear wafts through widow homes and churches
burn, the ear must be slow to speak,
the mouth must be quick to listen while the
EMPTY GRAVE still weeps.

nature wait for me

Nature fades, fades away.
Time slips; it ticks
and eats nature's vitality

But I must work.
Work they tell us!

A good man is hard to find,
only can be found with a stable check:
nature must fade.

If nature takes time, takes time to see,
it must fade: no time to stop,
no time to enjoy the rays
that create the prism on the glass.

Fade,
fade away nature
for we must work.
We must die,
die we must,
for they tell us such.
Fade away nature
but wait for us
so, maybe,
in eternity you we can see.

the dock

On the sun-stained dock, they stand silent with hands together: sweaty yet still.
The sun reddens their skin
as they wait for the moment to pass.

The dog trots by the dock, master at hand— his tongue drops drool with a grin.

The master hides his face from the sun, wiping his brow as he passes the dock swearing at the dog, who begins to run.

She rolls up her sleeves to catch the sun,
having to jump off the path for the passing
dog wondering why the master curses the wind
but at the dock, she sees the intertwined hands
wondering where the sun will hit her soldier's face.

In the swaying of the sun-heated grass, she crosses her legs
mourning the soldier that passed a year ago:
galvanized patriotism brought a lonely panic
and alone mornings of one coffee cup on the table
but she sits still, letting the sun redden her writing hand.

Behind the swaying grass, a wrinkled couple holds an
umbrella, the unbeknownst last day of sixty years of unity.
Forged by war and rations, attached by love, and led by days
the veteran stands in a fought-for land
as his wife loses a cancer battle next to her beloved soldier.

why v

We write because we can never speak to the deaf or turned
cheek. The hands of Goya paint our death, allowing us to
live fictitious nightmares or, maybe, life.

cleveland's vortex

Cleveland had streets to hear and cemeteries to see as my
frantic control issues embarrassed the ghost that walked by
my side.

If I walked a mile, I walked a hundred.
Walked the miles as a way to hear my God speak truths
that I lustfully wanted to ignore in my agitation.
Unsure if I should say goodbye to the city
or say thank you,
I unfurled where confusion would accost,
and truth could begin.

Cleveland always clamored and cursed with roads that
created a vortex
back to the mausoleum and the coffee shops.
Big dreams dripped from tongues until the dream outgrew
the white congregations and the old money that could
mention God without ever having love leaking off their
words.

the brownies made me giggle

Last night's moon will be
sterilized by tomorrow's cold coffee.
The wine stains the shirt right now
waiting for the sun to come before the next moon

Moods change when the new shirt is worn clean
and unwrinkled.

As the second holds one more moment,
the bottle will be emptied, but emptied together,
emptied just before the alarm clock sounds alone before the
next moon.

Blue or yellow, the American Spirits are all that matter
and matter of factly, the oil will drip off the gears
of the clock as the next moon approaches:
flick the ashes,
burn down the moment.

As Mother Nature weeps for
the damaged dogwood,
the wine paints the pallet so tomorrow's
moon can exist right now.

The night grows with drunk stumbles and stumbled words,
and the moment continues with slurred vision.
Visions of hands held under the next footprint moon occurs
knowing that there are more empty Guinness bottles
and bitten brownies where the rose of freedom will bloom.

brake lights and empty rooms

The day started with dried-out coffee beans in the canister
musty smell of boxes invading rooms.

New crooked smile bewilderment gave way
to broken rays of sun on empty ring fingers
as the foul smell of tape triggered towering regret.

A cacophony of questions left unasked,
emotionally violent ones left unheard
when musky incense permeated the joys
of tangled Sunday mornings in our beginning.
Concrete cold on the feet in the driveway, brake lights,
and empty room smells await
the completion of our relationship's entropy.

don't you know, boys do it all the time

She parted her hair for
carnival rides and rolling-paper-drives.

He and her whirled through
the weeds in high-waisted jeans
and cheap Christmas-stocking cologne.

Her shoes had holes in them:
Men go mad looking for treasures in a hole.

Rich coffee, thick syrup, tipsy driving
drove them to the point where madness
maligned the smile –
cigarette and sex perfume plumed through the room.
They would go separate broken-step ways, animals locked in
a zoo made maybe by divinity.

True Love Waits faded: she strutted with broken shoulder
confidence when he did not call and the church would not
pray: the ring, you must honor the ring.

Part the seas, see the shores, the boat to another land left
when Mother Mary closed the door
on her sanctity when his hands
sung a lustful hymn as the seam of her hymen dreams
burst with a “this will not hurt”
and “I’ll be here forever” lie:
Her white-laced-purity dreams were demeaned, but he
remained a boy after God’s own heart.

grandpa sat

Gut-shot luck, snakes crawled in the field– Death’s Angel slunk in the threshold, watching Granny do a liminal two-step with life and death.

Goodbye stuck on her lips, air suspended in her lungs long enough to gorge the moment

with eternity’s judgmental stare. She laid. He sat.

The house slept as Death’s Angel closed her eyes, obstructing the goodbye gasp.

Connecticut winters to Georgia summer peaches– all gone, all lost.

Cancer damned then cancer freed her to breathe in a land cancer free.

Twenty years later, still sipping the air of grief, Grandpa sits with her final gasp clamoring in his heart while Death’s Angel taps his dangly fingernails on grave’s threshold.

the willow whisks

I sit where the willows whisk the summer musk away. I
wait,
listening—
panged by lavender evening scents.
Sunrise rears ugly as though the cat o' nine tails. I sit, gaze,
remembering the mocha walls where lips pouted pouring
desire into mortality's infant hand.

empty graves

I saw the spiders crawl and heard the spoken lies
but under the April rains we chased empty graves.

Muddy shoes left traces, only to be washed away.
Hollow winds held your hand,
as your hair danced freely.

The ghosts were by our side, mimicking insecurities.
Lost for the sake of hope, faith for the sake of decorum.
It was dreary and sunny.
It was rainy and sensual.

We heard our youth's voice
and saw dying's impediment.
You wanted death near;
I wanted your hand in mine.

Others went inside the house,
I straighten the crinkled sheets.
Laughter connoted my misery,
the son drew me back.

Emotions flung and keys broken,
I walked to the top of the hill.
The door closed in coldness,
I cursed the cloudy heavens.
Even still, I chased empty graves.

You were life's harlot, cheapened by rusty plans,
always chained by whispers- you yearned for the silence:

Pills became an exilic elixir, my dear the dread is near.

Yet, in the dirt, I dig— planting yellow lilies.

Cursive thoughts yell.

No words tell of time gone.

Destiny's pearl sat down— telling all the truthful lies.

Paradox changed the point— paradigmatic shifts paused.

Foreign couches house time and strangers hold your face.

Waiting, wanting,

we stared out cracked windows

to see if fate will give grace a chance:

hoping that under the sin of night's glare

we again can chase empty graves.

moses

Moses floating through life
looking, longing for a mother,
or maybe a lasting lament of loss: died by lampshade light.
Days of summer sun and honeysuckle sweet
turn to dark briars of innocence lost
and soured lemon snacks.
Wrapped in cloth, clothed in anonymity- afraid,
abandoned, accosted by reality.
Words turn to a heavy naught,
tears are aligned as god.
Greatness defined by disaster
haunted by darkened shadows.
Sequestered by a heavy-handed misery
youth's justification now gone.
Promised land perished in the Pastor's sermon,
left inside naïve fairy tales.
Settling into introspective inquiry, forced to repeatedly ask
why, winds weather hidden caves
but seasons never change.
Caught inside a blistering winter weathered by the frost of
forever gone. Continually begging to float evermore,
evicting self from memory, memorialize forever mangled
love marked by violent melancholy.
Casket of youth yielded to withering age,
agonizing over that which is not
accepting a vulgar vicissitude after departure destined to
destroy happiness.

it used to be 1798

Cover up the dying grass
and dirty soles that never last
all for chance when locked doors
become our new neighborhood.
Flowers fall, standing in Tintern Abbey.
Can we go back to living in the abbey?
The tides bend against the days,
moments of sounds not heard
as we still move our beds
to stones laid on muddy clay.
How can we go back to when it
was more than this?

the bird sings

It stands.
It stays
allowing the passersby to see. Five-dollar deals,
the clicking heels
and Meals on Wheels grind along.

Skeptics and believers.
Lovers and lawyers
are all the same.

Marlboro lights
and worn-out lighters flutter out as it perches.

Offbeat snaps
come from the drunken man that lost his leg in Iraq
as it watches and waits.

The vibrato of the girl singing
and bravado of the boy strutting come close to seeing it.

But only when the bird sings is it seen.

eternity's restful night

He is dying for me,
dying so I can take that step he will never see.
I was never his, but I was always his son.
He will never hear,
the stories that try to say I do care but he will keep dying,
he will keep dying for me.
If his words come to a halt
and the grave greets him with a kiss,
he would say I did this for you,
did this so you could find the you
that you never could see.
When the wind comes
to blow his flickering candle out,
it will not take a man, it will take a father
because he is dying for me.
He never carried a cross, never wore a crown
but I was always his treasure, sister we were always his
reward and we were never his
but we were always his children.

I live because he is dying, dying for me.
Though I cannot say I love you,
I am not sure what it means,
I can say thank you
because I know you are dying for me, dying for us.

When his eyes finally see
eternity's restful night I will be left to say that he died for
me, that he lived for us

the faucet is leaking

Another drop of the tip— time felt no movement.
The faceless streets of the night: our neighbor.
Sharp noon days— the cock's crow— early mornings gone.
Socratic conversation condemned grabs and groans guide.
The faucet is leaking.
Ambition, a malevolent term when under the quilt's warmth.
Coffee and onion breath exhaled—
a seduction of amber-colored glasses.
Fading light bulbs, thrown paper,
illumination of the warmth,
only one moment at a time— the future waits on permission.
The embrace was supposed to last: an impregnating of want.
Harsh hours tick by, making joy bits of sand
sliding out of our hands.

why vi

We write for the track marks on side streets, once loved
daughters, lost.
The fathers who failed to tuck in a child reared in passion
but forsaken at the meal table.

curtains still blow

The curtains still blow—
as silence sashays through the halls.
It was never enough for us,
empty lines lasted too long.
I lied by the lack of speaking.
You brokenly spoke by lying.
The sun seemed to shine too bright.
Your hands kept cracking.
Please, put that bottle down,
I promise, sleep can come.
All was supposed to change.
Yet, is it not still the same?
I sit to watch the leaves fall,
as the curtains still blow.

she came south

Harmonies happened upon humility
amongst two strangers and one familiar wanderer.
In-between steeples and chapels
God was not found, nor was He in the pews.
Instead, the Spirit flowed out of a flask
and inside the chord progressions.
Outside, the leaves were careening to the ground.
If the yesterdays had a scowl,
the coming weeks looked like a new wine
in a dusty bottle that had been corked long ago.
Come, come, they proclaim,
come so that the time locked in empty rooms could be
redeemed and reassigned to the stage.
The dark was always a dress worn so well,
fitted for the lost spirit that knew the drought
caused by the sifting sand of time,
but the two strangers brought to light the scars.
With every off-note and mistimed strum,
life as they knew it revealed itself as a doppelganger.
College dropout or college attendee,
all tended to get lost on Cleveland's streets of gold,
but amidst the turmoil of youth, they found a fountain when
a new harmony was able to sync
in spite of the newness of the friendship.
They were taught to look at the stars,
it was how the wise men found salvation,
but it was an abomination to reach for them
unless the professor taught the way.
The good book could browbeat morality,
without ever speaking of miracles or creativity.

88 2nd street

88 2nd Street sits lonely, silent.
The rotting wood of forgotten churches
emits their mildew smell at one in the morning.
Her cigarette was put out then swept up.
The deacons no longer walk over.
Georgia strangers and hidden dangers
lurk in leery rearview memories.
Broken shutters and opened blinds
once hid a hectic son: forgotten believer.
Poppy seeds brought friendship.
Broken jalopy cars stranded smiles there.
Seventeen, seventeen, she was seventeen,
then she was thirty and blonde;
even thirty, married and addicted:
all afraid of the mysterious board—
broken by past lies and future worries.
Another sat near, but she was never one of them—
she was the pearl lost in the field
until the hectic son sold all, then lost more.

88 2nd street sits alone in silence:
memorandum of lessons never lost.
Dogwood leaves walk the streets
as the bell tolls, gathering weary believers—
the empty porch still holds her there,
holds all of them frozen in the fireworks of their time.

chacos

She sat with her hot tea
tranquilizing my mind with the way she twirled her hair.
She was looking for commitment.
She showed her empty finger.
I told her to commit to me was to commit to my Chacos.
She thought I was lying.
I showed her the tan lines on my foot.

4-13-18

We struck Syria.
Bombs and bombastic victory.
I drink from my mint green mug.
We are America,
cloaked in Red, White, and Blue—
praying hands covered in sticky brownish blood. Our
leader celebrates.
Can we mourn a world with bombs?
From the Big Bang to the
big bang of the falling weapons
we have evolved into mass destroyers, warriors with wings
in the night.
Tomorrow I will drink,
Pouring coffee in my mint green mug,
without washing the stain off my hands.

unpaved path

The green lines mix with the pine needles.
A twitch of nervousness
causes the cardinal to flutter off.
Unfathomed thoughts topple over falling water
as snowflakes drop on my tongue.
Tracks of deer and rutted tire marks
make way for the evening hike.
Crackles from squirrels and chirps from above, alienation
comes with a sweet cold breath.

Lethargy given over to the minnows' liturgy.
The brittle foundation of my stagnant soul
situates itself in isolation's cove
freed by unpaved paths and pantheistic pews.

madman world

Poetry is hard to understand
when upended by blurring yellow lines.
It becomes deaf when hustled through state crossing,
mission going identity-driven life.

But, amidst the agony of walking,
under dogwood blooms, by beer bottle litter,
poetry softens to become a still, small prophetic voice that
speaks of a madman world with
fields full of pearls worth a great price.

together

Let us run hand in hand with the clouds moving east,
our ambition moving west.
We will run, becoming numb
like the shots have settled,
etherized by the swaying of cars and fat-tongued bosses.

panic

Panic collapses its gangly fingers
over my trembling reality.

Elongating itself over the spine of the day.

Out of the weeds it stalks, walks slowly behind my doubt to
reprimand the remaining moments of a choked-out day and
remind that it will return with tomorrow's dew.

black/white

White, black-
bombs explode out of the mouth of the mortal to
immortalize the fractured factions of black, white.

Racist by vote, racist by gunshot-light,
racist because of black/white divide.

The media never stands near
to snap photos of black, white unity because
to divide is to sell,
to sell is to gain
to gain means an I must increase
so the them that stands together must not be
photographed.

christianity

The resurrection is expressed in the healthy bee
and its untainted honey.

stop with me

Stop with me, pause with me.
Whether it be the new day or old night:
Let it rouse, let it inspire, let it conspire to fossilize
the fragments of lost sunrises and chilly winter mornings.
The origin of all exists in stopping, pausing,
to feel the crisp morning
or the frazzled light of moon's night.
There will be a thousand more,
a thousand more mornings, maybe even more nights.
But will you be there with me?
To stop, to wait, allowing for possession of the now, the
clinging of the moment at hand
before we all go mad, gripped inside times iron-fisted rule.
All is well if you stop with me if you pause with me.
Touch the dehydrated leaves,
feel them crack, crumble inside your hand
as the stem falls through the cracks in your fingers.
Smell the sodden soil after humidity's rain.
Youth's integrity fades, dissipates into adult happenings.
But just stop with me, just pause with me.
Let the words spoken linger.
Let the lingering smells of the honeysuckles speak.
If you stopped with me if you paused with me
then my eyes will no longer be needed.

For we would see the wonder of the working bee,
that pollinates the flower in our hair
if we just listen, just hear nature asking:
Can you stop with me?
Can you pause with me?

middle of the road, dear

There's something striking about standing barefoot
in the middle of the road under the quarter light midnight.
Satellite, barefoot healing – the night is a balm to slather over
anxiety and hope: rest.

No cars.

Faint faceless laughter distant behind manicured trees.
Dim light, bright thoughts illuminated by the misty sky.
Effervescent childlike memories reject worries of tomorrow
standing barefoot in the street
looking at Milky Way vastness.

baby

Allow our hands to hold the leaf of the scarlet oak after we
feed the dirty-cheek widow and
comfort the shaking addled baby of the addict.

winter fangs

Homeless bow
writhing in the agony of frost.
The fangs of winter will bleed their eye dry.
Gutted finger, gutter beds made,
there will be no marmalade on cold biscuits
eaten by shaking hands.
High-school-dreams
drip out on the freezing concrete
as the crest of canceled light
threatens the wanderer with
a new day without a date for relief.

to grow was the worst part

Early morning frost scraping, `
Clinch Mountain lay barren in the distance-
I am back home.
It never changes, no matter how often I leave.
The holler will remain hollow next year,
and the next, probably even the next.
Ruptured bottles, broken glass paths
will wield mystery for another mile-apart neighbor kid.
My southern heart grits and grinds
through questions of ontology
and worth: am I the pearl or the swine?
I grew up looking at Tennessee sun with
California dreaming eyes.
Coast hoping while tomato field picking.
I had to grow, and to grow was the worst part.
'Ater slanting gas station talk with dirty quarter payments
came and went without asking if they could disappear.
Pine sap sticky backs after shade tree
talking during frosty nights
helped format escape plans- Morristown lights once told me
to set my eyes on the horizon over yonder.
Creek bottoms, arrowhead searching-
Sunday dripped slowly out of the faucet with fishing tackles
and live bait swimming through the water
but I escaped, and yes ma'amed out of teenage anger
and twenty's heartache until I yes sir'ed while
staring at her purple wedding dress.
I grew out of California eyes, and to grow was the worst part,
but now I sit on a Chattanooga back porch sitting
with small-town hope missing Bean Station tomato fields.

anticipation

The smell, pungent, threatening,
perfume of species.
Love commanded, I felt dread:
your sacrifice, my secret.
My tongue not taken captive; fate smiled – restraint.
I eat, you evade, silence seduces. The food forced down.
You inquire of the quality? We both know I lied.
Another taste awaits, stalking, looming, in the absence.
Rustling grass, chimes clinging, the moon awakens want.
Fused in arresting ambiguity, midnight approaches.
Boredom binds, numbers frozen: halted and mocking.
Birds bellow notes of nature– foreign songs soothe.
We stand apart– anticipation– staring at the expanse.
Both desire what is requisite. This, all that remains.
Your footsteps make me rise, My lover, my silent plea:
our enemy. Dripping, walking. Focus arrested.
You – stand still. Vulnerably statuesque, void.
Forever and never, conjoined–
tantalizing fulfillment.
The clock's chains loosened, sadness creeps near.
Forged weary sojourners, stuck– sickles of mourning.
Lying eyes fervently discharge fumes of desire.
Delve into our pulling blackness, beckoning validation.
Need mercy: your cracked hands, my keen mind.
I bow down, request by you, weak and strong.
Reduced to servant and master: dichotomous desire.
Silhouettes shutter in the flicker: light by flame.
Angry hope, helplessness–
with love, exasperation, and desire
all one, all contradicting, all agreeing in the awaited taste.

evil is in the hands

Over the crow-flying horizon,
the day lingers, gashing the gates of the hay field
holding on until the speckled starry night settles.

Pumpkin fields flourish, then rot; death is never far from the
tree of life: snakes hide in the overgrown grass.

Bedside, dinner-inspired, Sunday kneeling
prayer ensconces the meditation of the wanderer. White
dogwood petals, white wedding dresses, Heaven floats off
the clouds in puffs of white.

But prayer becomes perilous when put in the hands
of white supremacists or whiteout-efficient editors.

Evil is in the hands, not just in the words. The hand can
hand the homeless a plate, and wipe the widow's tear.
Or the hand can sow the red and white backdrop
of swastika flying flag.

When night comes, the broken-hearted mamma folds her
hands to pray while
the world whimpers and splits into sides,
fighting over left-right rhetoric.

black tambourine

Preacher ring the black tambourine. Dance!
Preacher dance with your people!

Let the instrument guide,
the masses sing.

The devil will dance in the pews
patting his knee to your black tambourine.
Peaches bruise when burned by the sun. The drunks see in
part,
the missionaries know in part, but the shawl of love is
worn in whole.

A storm is stewing, the eye strengthens.
The black tambourine will seduce.

Father ran after Eve's apple,
Mother dances in the pew with the devil.

Preacher, ring the black tambourine
before your people realize God is in the trees not in the
dead-tree pews.

let us reason together

Granny, come, come:
we must reason together.
For years kept chasing closure
like it was a feather blowing in the wind: silence.

A baby boy— once cajoled into baby steps—
must now learn how to walk.
You consoled but would not condone,
protected, but would not justify:
Foresight and understanding never brushed off wrongs.

Close them eyes, Granny, never ever look into my eyes,
the lies will horrify and ruin the boy that once was here.

I did it so well, did I not?
You never knew why, but you saw I died a thousand deaths
without knowing how to be alive.
Ah, that stench of death
that always seemed to come off my breath
whenever I would begin to explain:
The grave was always too close,
so I would stop before you dare get near.

How dare you, your damnable actions:
You just wanted to be mother
but, in the end, I just wanted one more summer.
God would never listen,
Though I pleaded with him, pleaded with you,
pleaded every time I died one of my deaths.

I did it so well, did I not?
The family suffered, I suffocated, and you
tried to hold onto me
even though you knew death was close: Mine or yours?

It infuriated me that Grandpa worked those hours,
you planted those flowers, and I was still such a coward.

But, please, let us just reason together:
The deaths must stop, you must die, and I must learn to live:
Or maybe learn to love.
But you must die so I can understand the meaning of live.
Please just see understanding is not a
necessity since you exist where time does not exist.
Just see, as you tried to be mother and he tried to be pater,
I felt like the bastard child.

It was never your fault, never sister's fault,
the flaw was in the way I died so many deaths.
If love was supposed to be felt, I just always felt numb.
If love was to be understood,
I only knew how to ask why I ached:
It was all my fault, and in the night where I never said
goodbye, I treated you like I was a bastard child,
Let us reason together: If I admit it was all my fault,
will you finally die?
If you die then maybe I will know how to say those words,
say the words that a bastard son cannot.
Maybe I can say the trinity of closure:

I love you. I am sorry. Granny, goodbye.

american jesus

Jesus, we are seething.
We, me and all
of the strange generation
that caused our neighbors to be strangers,
are the teething toddlers of desperation's offspring.

Jesus, will You stand on that bank,
that bank of Jordan
where the river flows
and Your name is known
for miracles and freedom?

We want a Jesus
who died on the cross, bloodied
but resurrected, not confiscated
and put in the line of a bank.

Pastor, you condemn, but the Jesus we know
sat with the dime bag whores
and walked through twenty-one and up doors.
Pastor, it seems that the seams of your fairytale have burst.

Throw that pulpit away,
tear down the green-stained altar.
Our face is forgotten by American Jesus,
but the Jesus on the cross
reaches down into our hell to show his nails.

We almost lost our faith
because of the constructed church

but first April rains
brought days that spring with life,
spring with creative powers
that towers over our depression.

Jesus, you should have never died.
Their nine-to-five mentality
would make You stay in your grave:
They are killing you again.
Graven images go into those plates being passed
but they will keep praying as long as their employers dutifully
keep paying.

Jesus, turn that water into wine: we rather get drunk
than listen to the preacher cluck, cluck around
about a world we never knew and a new word that
would condemn the blood that fell for the sins of we,
the sins of me.

We are addicted, inflicted, addicted to the infliction of the
world they created: their ignorance

of the world they created:
their ignorance
rolls the stone back over your grave.
If Your death brought life then why does Your life
bring my generation's creative death?

Apparently, it was an apparition,
the You that walked on water would tell us to make a plan,
to get that degree
that allows us to play six degrees of debt.

The church speaks words but cannot see,
cannot see the You in me because to believe
is to be the them that condemns those
that are different than their doctrine.

Let us tear it down,
Jesus, tear down the walls,
tear down the halls
that confiscated Your name.
Do You not see,
Jesus, our dreams they will slay.

American Jesus, go away,
let us have our cross back, let the resurrection be real.

Church, we read your books, read your looks, we were
trained to be your verbal whores.

Tack this on the door, it is our new thesis:
we stand to say American Jesus come off that cross.

We may sleep in when the orator laments spiritual slumber
but we are the sojourners who traverse the desert
to get away from the modern Church.

The steeple stands tall, we stand taller.
We are steeped in passion, in passionate belief,
they are stuck with their American
Jesus that enslaves them to
a capitalistic God and Pastor.

According to them,
we walk with fires licking our feet
but Jesus we believe, do they not see,
do they not believe us when we pray at Your feet?

But this American Jesus makes us sterile,
makes us doubt

because they rather shout about the fags
than carry the bags of the homeless two miles instead one.

Jesus we loved you on the cross, loved
you when the stone rolled, but now
we rather roll and stone
while listening to The Rolling Stones
rather than sing about
a foreign Amazing Grace
because the sweetness of that sound
was lost when they dropped grace
and formed your bastard:
American Jesus.

Can you speak again Jesus?
Tell them to lock those doors,
lock the doors of the church
until the wolf stops stalking, stops walking
hand and hand with the pastor.
Because until American Jesus dies
the grave foreshadows our home instead of Your hope.

why vii

Why do we write?
We write because we are you.