Real Wild West

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REAL WILD WEST

By

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BA, University of Montana, Missoula, MT, 2003

Professional Paper

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts
in English, Creative Writing

The University of Montana
Missoula, MT

Spring 2007

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Dedicated to Scott Preston, the more west and the more real.

Notes On And Or In A Suicide

Colored like glass when it’s colored, the rain-materialed ubiquity of grief. The visible and what’s everywhere absent coincident, potentially patterned on the same wave. The me that is silenced in you, waiting for sleep, the me I abjure. The you that respirates in me unfathomable, the coarse salt grains rubbed into my scalp and beard, white unrefracted, like you, grizzled and lonely. The clamor of trains coupling and uncoupled, the sighing industry of place, quite materially rolling down the walk-up’s run-down face, taking pains for pills, waiting. It must be like this, waiting to die. Up there the sagging shelves damoclean wait sheaved In the willfully arcane. Up there silence opens a sky-wide eye. The wallpaper sheathing the stairs split, re-split and leaved. Waiting to sleep and to climb when I wake. The you that is me that is all I will take.
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I. West to East
A Way of Knowing

What is left of the iced-over river?
  A sharp edge to the worn rocks.
That is, a blade cleaving the water from the sky.
  This is a way of knowing where we are.
Late winter, in Montana. A dry year.
  This is a way of wondering
  with what we ought to concern ourselves.
The direction of the wind, which is no longer so cold
  that it lifts our skin away from us.
  The light trapped with the current under the ice's edge,
  which rolls up at us continuously.
It is not daylight, but halogen streetlight, and we shudder
not with the cold but in rhythm with the shuddering bass
spreading from the tinted windows
easing along Main Street.
  It is Saturday night.
It is.
  It is the year 2005.
We'll have great fires this summer; smoke will crowd
over the rooftops and down around us.
  I hope you see it.
When you saw the doctor today, he said
the tests all came back normal. There is no way to know
why your heart has picked up a syncopation.
  Why you miss one beat in four, every time.
The dry limbs tap against each other.
  They sound like nervous birds,
or like cracking ice.
We are reduced to a purer form of guessing.
  The tests were inconclusive.
This is a way of knowing the right word.
  Or if there ought to be a right word.
This is how we think.
  This is how we watch the ice grow back.
I keep saying we.
  If I am alone here
I might walk out into the river.
  The low water is still fierce enough to pull me under.
It is cold enough to spread like fire
up my legs. To devour my heart.
  To lick up my reaching arms like dry branches,
my grasping fingers.
Honey

The ants describe sly lines, find
the lip of the picture frame, the window sill
where it creases to the kitchen wall. They will
always fit, the necessary space defined
by their own bodies. I don't know
how long this line has been here. I imagine
I hung the picture from it; the window was fashioned
as the description of its absence. Ants go
leaving one certainty and always discover
the route to the next is a straight line. I have traced
this every morning over coffee, aware
of writing the line from corner to corner and over
the household boundaries, and never noticed them placed
along it, writhing bodies carrying what had to be there.
Drive

Stalks of frail grass fence the freeway here to horizon. I fly down in radial hum half lifted from inside—the light head lingering in the altitude, the heavy center strapped to the chassis—into farmed fields unfolded below. In the rush of all this there is no way to see any individual blades. No one life: in a car there is back there and up there and there is scenery. There is a blur of blades policing the borders, one way down along the wall, flight focused, defined indifference.
Real Wild West

Is this the West or my dream of the West
I’m driving through? A freeway full of faces,
everyone bored, smoking, squinting
into the sun settling into the horizon,
spread over the whole flat distance
ahead of us. On the long straights
the semis swagger and show their teeth.
The scarred little buttes nod as we fly by.
Prairies all turned to crops,
Crops all left to seed in the sun.
A late model suburban in the passing lane,
pulling ahead up the hill at ninety, easy,
wasn’t that you? Wouldn’t that be me,
if I could have it? I’ll take
everything on this side,
that side’s yours, up to the blistered
horizon of waving wheat. When I reach
into the empty passenger seat
grasping for something salty wrapped
in cellophane, bought under fluorescent lights
in a truckstop with a casino
in the back and in the back of that
a throbbing of lights and
half a dozen poor girls ready
to drop their filmy slips for a greasy
dollar bill, you turn to me and grin
from under your sunburnt eyes and say,
Saddle up, asshole, we’re riding.
Ghost Farming

The irrigators drape their long fingers across the folded fields, they move with grace's patience, the slow hand of a lover wanting to leave himself in every pore. But they are driven by the same pressure they spill into the ground. There is no person present. All the water that pushes them, pushes out, draws bright green lines across the pallid dirt, has come a long way from some far river, trailing down some far mountain, owned by some far man who owns more earth than he could walk each week, owned by lines of credit stretched from here to your dinner plate, dear reader. This makes me think of love, for I am driving all day to touch a woman I have come to know as the land I spread myself across.

From the moving car the pipes reveal patterns cross-hatched on the fields. As each line approaches a certain angle turns the steel into a burnt strip that waits in my eye for the next to fill it.

Tonight at dusk I'll watch my fingers' shadows deepen into her skin, watch what ghosts we raise together out of those hollows, those fleshed furrows.
Missoula

The milky waters in the irrigation ditch
spin slowly, drawing spiral maps of a town
spreading against the banks. Their revolutions
push them into and out of the bank’s shadow
spiked with silhouettes of crabgrass.
Lines of silty scum radiate
into boulevards, sprout elm and oak.
The ditch has grown a sidewalk on its shoulder,
the sidewalk cracked with age before I was born.
The cool rising from the water dies
in the dry air. When I was ten, riding
tennis lessons, I’d lay my bike down
here in the ditch’s green aura, lie with my head
over the edge breathing the heavy earth,
imagine slipping in, swallowed by
the white liquid and sliding slowly away
from the sun-striped sidewalk, past the old
farms, and then all imagination failed.
I had no way to know what was under that.
And all of that happens now, my body
held by the water, the dirty years sloughing off,
swirling away from both sides, carrying off
layers of me into the clotted roots
of lawns, the deep reach of oaks, the concrete
forms of old farmland, and, underneath,
whatever else was there before that.
Ritual

I have caught the last salmon who will swim up this river.
I have hung him in the smoke for days.
When he grew dry and hard on the edges
I emptied him and fed the ruined meat back to the river.
It will go on. I have sewn leather
into the hard salmon sides for comfort.
I think it is big enough
that I can lay inside, for surely
the last salmon is bigger than I am.
It is my thought that we all could fit in here
and float down the river and all that weight,
all of us in our big salmon boat,
could wash all of these dams out to sea
and start spawning all over, all of us.
Baptism

Sticks and leaves for hair, packed with mud, struggling, her arms held by hands just big enough to overlap where white flares out into the softer colors of her skin,

she is, I hope, not there but in the sun on glossy leaves above, even the hectic swarm of gnats around their heads, and not in the deep eye of the hose aimed at her face,

in the silent, sudden fury of her playmates, in her helpless hands and her idea that they will never do it again. They will never do it again.
Wild Country Radial Tires

We left the house, the low bed and slanted ceiling, the Japanese fans and row of tin wind chimes, the old TV and tacked-up pine wood shelves. We left the muddy drive, the compact truck and its Wild Country radial tires, the owner jailed on petty drug charges, maybe a careless battery. We left his daughter, the dull feet on the stairs.

We backed out into a wider movement, the mark of the possible collapsing as it approached the horizon, the wild country and the idea of escape purified in geometry, the right angles between desire and doing, the flat refusal of the world to lift us up.
Democracy

Back home I hear
they're building little
concrete round-
abouts in all
the residential
bits of town.
I should say "we
are," right? There were
meetings, I am
sure, and my
opinion, should I
happen to have
had one, would
have been duly
noted. I'm sure
our actions are
universal
in their bene-
ficence. Or
at least they keep
us looking busy.
There are, you know,
worse things that
could be done
under my
theoretical
signature.
I hear, in fact,
there's a war on.
Fourth Crusade

In anno domini eleven ninety-nine
the best men (saving the Kings, of course
they had to say) went saying *now the Holy City*
but fought instead dirty years upon years
men of that same lord. This was the quest of the West, yes?

Yes.
Western Border, Northern Cheyenne Reservation

Somewhere here the serpentine blacktop stabbed through a wall hidden in the shifting grasses.

Somewhere between these low humped hills the grains of dirt red and round in the palm

stopped being Crow and became Cheyenne. I came so far driving so fast it all

looked the same: the hills' low shadows hiding and revealing each other. I stopped

to get low, to see. To look between hissing stalks up at clouds skidding the horizon,

leaning posts and a pale blue house trailer, broken gate, charted strands of wire.
Buying Lunch in Indian Country

On the porch of the Chicken Coop,  
the only restaurant in Lame Deer, Montana,  
the heart of the Northern Cheyenne nation,  
three old men roll cigarettes in the shade.  
Blocking the door, a dog rolls half over,  
his skin pink beneath the hair, his wet-red cock  
sliding out towards the hot street.  
Greasy smoke sticks to the rafters inside,  
the frybread and frozen chicken strips,  
the canned mushrooms and dripping onion rings,  
the red and white paper napkins  
on the rough wood table.  
This is the heart of a nation:  
a second hand garbage truck  
clangs along a pitted street,  
the old men's faces shine  
dark as the table. I wait a minute  
in the door, but there is no  
border I can cross. My hand in the haze  
holding out the limp, folded dollars  
shines under the fluorescence,  
the smell of ammonia leaked in  
from the laundromat in the next room  
opening me up. So I turn back,  
lost immediately in the street's glare,  
the halo that washes away the doorframe  
even as I walk through it. The men haven't moved  
and say nothing, leaning farther back,  
settling their shoulders into the concrete wall.
*Retreat*

Back away from the black road.  
Hissing trucks, diesel air undertow.  
Noisy pull of one direction, the other.

Back away up around the worn bluff, snakeholes  
gazing at the sun that smothers in the dust  
on the windshield. Away from the low  

thunder rocked plains and the river.  
The rattle of the cattle guard  
as we cross. The higher, dry air.

Leave the air, the day, the kingsnake  
split open on the red dirt road,  
erosion and wasting, leave love  

for one other, leave love of anything  
but this, all this, lightning’s thin wrist  
bending back, the black sky opening  

the pine trees’ shadows,  
their sinuous branches,  
the tide of wind above us.
I’m singing roads, the grass: we started out
striking these leafed-up streets, scabby, choked
by sick old lawns, the dirt right up to pavement
—the city says we get curbs the day we make ’em—
then the older road from town, scuffing
canyon walls, the truckstop and the mill,
pines bent round the freeway exits stunting
hard-edged sedges in their shadows, then
the divide and descent, the feeling that here you fall
into a world of grass, of road, the freeway
soft almost, lain down in prairies, curves
so gentle in summer’s shimmer I coast onto
reservation blacktop riding on
the radial tire roar of America,
ride through it just like that, the black road,
this story, this beginning, singing with
the kids and Jimi Hendrix on the sputtering
FM from back in Billings, pointed East,
I’m out to understand something about
this whole big West, the dirt, the snakes, the coyotes,
the crystal meth and pit mines, strip malls, strip clubs,
Custer County and Crazy Horse Malt Liquor,
border patrols and water rights and my hometown,
back there a day behind me, and the kids
just have to ride along and listen, and you,
you, I guess, had better decide right now.
A note on the preceding

Who am I to sing myself or suppose anything for anybody, especially you, right? This is the story of a definitively white middle-class American adventure. This is, therefore, barely a story. I put two kids and a dog in a car and drove from one side of a large western state to the other. And back. In between, we camped. Camping is so American an idea that the Spanish word for camping is cámping. We drove from a college town in a mountain valley to a hillish kind of bump in the stuttering start of the Great Plains. We drove through some Indian towns and tried not to stare. We gathered ourselves beneath a few pine trees in the middle of a grass world. A story is a piece of land chartered by four stakes. My stakes are these: a Missoula of the mind that is left behind; the long-armed freeway; the reservation bound by the Tongue River; a book. There should be a motive, right? And a love interest. If it's a story. My wife, my love, was digging bison bones on the rez, and we missed her, me and the two kids and the dog, and so we drove, and we camped, and we drove back, west.
II. Powertrain (*Translatio Imperii*)

*Y de otro modo cómo*

*todo acto es traducción:*

Put another way, how

every act is a translation:

-José Emilio Pacheco
Things and Words

In principio and why not?
Look, in front of you.
There was nothing, there was a rose,
the ecstatic release of a stem,
a bird coming and going,
dreaming it’s a bird,
a stone, the slow flower
worth some thousand years
of Earth's hard care.
Some innocent hand's always
reaching for this deception,
stopping at the touch.
Please forgive the vulgarity:
in principio erat verbum, and this
something better was a mere thing,
a sung word shaped like sliver of sunrise,
desire sifting through the air
that surrounds the human, magic work
screwing the flower into the world
without touching it. You see,
I'm translating straight from Pedro Salinas,
tracing with my fingernail
these silent hosts marching
from his pages. He's afire
with worry and only this work
is clear amid clouds and clouds.

You'll have to trust me,
seventy monks kept to their cells for a year
and each one emerged with this poem
clutched in his thin hands,
these sainted words. The rainbow is
dispersed light, this age
dispersed millennia, my poem
the thinnest spray thrown from an ocean,
settling through the grains
of womb-warm sand and now,
here it is in front of me, Pedro says,
unthought by the sun, a light
et lux in tenebris lucet
in darknesses laid over darknesses
et tenebrae eam non comprehenderunt
and the darknesses could not understand.
On the paper appears
a word:
in ipso vita erat et vita erat lux hominum
in it was life, and the life was human light.
Apologia for the Election Night

I’m sorry I didn’t explain myself:
I wrote the poem last night, drunk. Pedro and I
had some whiskey and some words
about the current administration. His feeling was
that everyone lives on the land
of their country, which is a tongue,
and the free are always waiting
to be thrown off. I love this idea,
I am living on that fleshy wave, crouched,
fingertips on the wet surface, waiting
to be flung into the air
by an exaltation.
I lied: I composed these words to a steel-belted thrum,
arching last summer across some American highway,
racing west towards the huge glaring face of the god;
Pedro left Spain in 1936
and wrote this poem in Baltimore
in his native tongue;
I am thrown off and flying, I wrote these words
to the slap of my shoes
on the sidewalk
after the bad news in a small town
in Montana at quarter to two
in the morning, going for another drink.
When I crossed the wooden bridge
over the river I heard a weak squawk
and I said: oh? a heron?
And he flew, great, blue,
wings tucked in, a dart between
the cables of the bridge and I said: goodnight, Pedro,
goodnight, I choose
your flight along this river
of tongue, your dance
along the stage of time, your wings
flinging out again as you clear the wires, I choose
this flight, lifted off the land,
the confusion of every voice
and all their truths.
Like an annoying welt, this new world,
    and hanging, brassy and vacant,
the sun’s still up there, yeah, my goddamn
legs still stiff, stark in this light.
I’m mocked by all these unripe fruits,
    and all of this is a shine, I know,
everything, that is, light
on the pale fig-leaf pulling away
    from the red-stained fence, the branches
pinned back with wire and arching along the boards.

I arrived on the bus at sunset and slept til noon.
    Even this far south the fruit is still hard.
I’m in shorts and shirtsleeves, watching a crow beneath the fig tree
stroke the stiff skins with his beak.
He’ll wait, he decides, for the fruit to sweeten.
We both wait, the radio filling the air with words.
When I pick one, I’m tempted to say it’s mine,
but my voice comes out as rough as the crow’s
and he’s gesturing towards the sun. I’m held down
by the serpentine ficus stalk across my tongue,
the taste of wood and the stopped-up fountain,
how can you, he says, lie to me? We say together:

    but oh, when, when,
        will it open itself,
        the flood, over the dry land?

Where is he?
    Sworn to the living mind.

(The god made us three constellations.
This, he says, is why we are continuous.)
Translatio imperii (Powertrain)

At dusk, the sun gets caught up
in the mountain’s pale grasses and
pulls away from the roofs and flickering streetlights.
I am walking the clear border,
the line where the mountain folds
into the flat valley, where town
seeps out, I am watching
the light wash out of the mountain in waves,
fade into the air that is not dark but clear
all the way up to the black behind everything.

Two young does glide down the slope
and stop in the street in front of me, looking.
Headlights stop in front of the deer.
Behind me, a movement in the brush
of the corner lot, bright, burning: lion.

If I step quickly into the street, and the deer start,
and the truck drops into gear and the engine noise rises,
all of us, moving from fear, a song:

    O Phoebus, fucker,
    all comes from thee: the moonlight,
    the mountain imperious, shining,
    its third-rate grace: thine.

I am not free of you here. This engine
moves on your fire, my legs are your pistons
no less than the lion’s teeth,
the gasoline laid down beneath the earth
in the black beginnings of empire, the illusion
of a line, of any free word.
Festival: Sol Invictus

Look at this sad thing.
Slinking towards the deepest hole
the southern sky can hold, this sun,
why not wrap it in a blanket,
shoulder it to the horizon, stuff it
elbow-deep in the loose mud?
This is nothing to hide from
or worth a second look, this mockery
of power, this shadow under shadows.
Two thousand years for this?
Since empire smothered song, took
a word for a command, left us
with the ornate squawks of a crow.
This is the translation of power:
an unmetered line, a borrowed image,
a body kept alive in winter.
Nothing here is not his.
I am writing this poem in the
bony-fingered dawn of solstice,
praying come again, maker,
come again, sun, knowing
how many have prayed this,
how many have known.
III: East to West
Certain mists will clutch with a dry patience to the streetlight, its little sphere of here, I am. I am in the middle, now street-bound, hovering as it were above a painted line, epi-divisible as it was I am reaching to grasp a word which I found out there. At times it seems that we are knocked about in a way which precipitates our fall. At times gravity comes through us and pulls out a helpless thought, ah, this? is my life?

The word is I and my fingers caressing the cold long center of it think, no, this is wrong, but I can’t help it I found it I am drawing out of us and lengthening here is this structure columning down the page. At times it seems I can never be both taut and enveloping I found an I. I foundered and fly.
We can say *buffalo*. We can say *Indian*, like it means something. We can make it mean something. Those who got long ago their own story wrong made sounds we remember wrongly, the echoes smothering in the soft earth. Other sounds are just sounds; the collection of pops and grunts that is *Bison*, that is *Northern Cheyenne*, dug from the same mud of alien language. On rainier days the bones rise almost willingly. Today the sun has packed the ground to stone, and odd bits of old bison sweat in the makeshift shade, exhausted from trying to contain the history we give them.

We can call all this a *buffalo jump*, say we understand the intention of some people who never left but come out on clear days to ring the site and see this collection of bones driven into the red ground by our imagination. We can all
stand together
in the earth shade
when the sun sets at
eleven PM,
watch the heat
shimmer up from
our square-drawn
grid, and say
I think I get it
now, I do.
Jump

Bison head and bison back, bison hump and bison ass, the whole world is bison and moving, whole world is pushed whole world is encircled and snared and caught up in itself snorting and feeling its sides sway as it runs, eyes and nostrils full of itself, the huge shit-and-sex smell of itself, run-to-run rush of itself, nothing but bison and sky and ground and ground until there is no ground, the whole world collapsing on itself, crushing nothing but itself.
Prickly Pear

Stories I ought to tell myself, I ought
to tell the kids, meanings I half forgot
or the words, the right ones. I know the names
—know, I mean, that I forgot them all.
The foot-rhythm and the river-rhythm. Why else
do we sit around fires? The kids look up
at me over the bending flames and then
make up their own stories when I don’t speak.
My wife told me once about the healer
who came to visit their work site and sat
that night by the fire. He had a story about
prickly pears and she told me. It was
something about only sitting down
on one once, I think. He told it, and then
he sat on one, or she did, or had
just before, which is why he told the story,
and she hasn’t since, and I don’t remember but
while they spoke the coyotes circled the camp
and howled their frustration at not hearing
how it ended, or maybe they wanted the rabbits
that slept beneath the outhouse and hid behind
the tents and knew the places coyotes wouldn’t
enter. Or maybe the coyotes sang in hopes
of telling them that they were the rabbits and
could come outside the fire’s glow without
fear of harm or coyotes or stories.
Rattler

A part of the desert is moving towards you.
A part of the desert is looping up and uncoiling,
the desert is raising itself up.

You didn’t know you had this fear inside you.
You didn’t know you could so vividly imagine
the casual parting of flesh, the incision,
the release. While the landscape was unfolding
in the car window you were singing,
your tongue sliding along the roof
of your mouth, you were thinking
of the fat muscle probing, of creation.
Of music. You thought about the night

your daughter was probably conceived,
how flesh had never seemed so full,
or maybe the memory is confused,

maybe that night came later, or
hasn’t happened yet, some promise
of a turgid future, flashing forward,

driving, a part of everything moving
too fast to think about, the music
quickened into a low incantation, a dry rattle.
Aurora Borealis

I like a reality hard enough to scratch,
the thin fingernail moons in the redwood table,
washing out into tides of woodgrain.

I was aware that night of a noise
in the groundcover. It was nothing
compared to the noise of the street except

that it was nearer, and sinister,
and now much like the high winds wracking
the thin, dry heads of pine above me.

I wished that night that you would quit
talking God, and none of us
believers anyway, in the void

of evidence. When a tree
betrays its piney nature and
explodes into a flock of birds

moving in one curling wave
cresting over the butte’s crusted
edge, I believe that Newton’s laws

can explain both why they should fall
and why they don’t and I can do
neither. Why should I believe in any

less than the memory of birds
in daylight, the thought that the snake
last summer in the nightshade is

rustling in the dark now, while then
behind me light was rolling up
in the north, breaking across the sky?
Colstrip

We’d been up in the brush three days when we came down for water and a sight of people other than ourselves, drove through the Indian towns but didn’t know where to stop until we were through the rez and the kids spotted a bright plastic slide curling like a lover into a clear pool in Colstrip. We sat in the car with the dust lifting off our faces into the dry air, the company ball park spread softly below the concrete stacks, the grass the first real green we’d seen all week. The beautiful white mothers lifted their children and twirled them to show there was no spot of coal left anywhere, no residue of the hollowed earth beneath us.
On The Freeway Passing Over a Mining Town

Who’s to say that this should matter? I have a sluggish tumble down into the canyon, wrinkled iron, these words, the freeway, a salve of sunlight smothering in white the windshield. It’s easy to see: from up here there is no town. No one ever felt the ground and grinned up into the dark forest. No one dove under rock to find themselves in a narrow life, sold themselves downtown, dug up dirty wonder with their hands and wondered what had hid it. No one ever waited til noon to see the sun. No one built those shelters of imported brick.

From up here its all betrayed by a sign, “historic,” by the trail of rusty shacks over the shaft. I take shelter in what is mine.
Neah Bay

Up on the far corner of a nation,
the thought of leaping off. A dry rock,
and all around the pure wild of sea.

In 1492 a ship landed
across the continent and here mud slid
over a village, saving in pliable earth

the people from everything that came after.
The people left have clearcut some land.
In the opened fields alder shoots

ring the cedar stumps. Everything
will be replaced and replaced again.
Crows emerge from unlikely shadows, seeds

tripping off their beaks. It’s horrible,
loving what you have and hating
how you got it. In the museum shop

I choose from the designs a raven
dropping from his beak the sun and moon
and earth to be scattered below

his wandering. I will mark myself
with his image and remember
the woman in the gift shop,

her fat, loose face, her soft hand
folding over the money, her hard eyes
that said she knew what she was selling.
Matthew Ten-Five

And Jesus said unto the twelve,
go not on those gentile freeways,
travel not to those dirty Indian towns,
heal only the lost lambs of Israel.
Fireworks

-Fuck yeah, and running towards me up the low rise away from the river –I don’t know how long’s the fuse on this thing, run and the fire follows them up. Behind them the flashing flume draws the outline of three men and –fuck yeah, freedom the figures fade back into the night. The explosion cracks a red and blue head trailing white tendrils down into the weeds.

I’m thinking, six days, guys, it’s July tenth. They’ve stopped to look halfway up the rise. I’m standing up here listening and thinking, two hundred thirty one years and six days. The men have gone back down and –how about this one, eh? and three days ago four bombs split London from the belly. I’m trying to get this arithmetic down while they sound again the official cry and another one goes up. I’m wondering what I’m doing walking around an Indian town up in the far north of America counting days and watching the sparks sputter out in the dry grass.
Arms and the Man

(This letter I never got)
Hey buddy: still out here.
Can't pave the desert.

Just a road through, armored plates.
Nation state: new tattoo.

I mean to tamp this all down.
We killed all those buffalo, you know I'm big.

I picked up a stray word here or there.
Two words: peace and watch-out.

Don’t ask me to write them.
The letters all watered down.

I could go on.
Maybe you saw me on TV.

Pre-emptive people-building project.
Money: what money.

Enough asphalt we'll win them.
Remember the Plains.

We drew all those lines.
Enough sunlight: colors gone.

Same here as there.
Still driving: road squint.

I joined-up to get shit done.
I'm leaving when it is.
Eastern Border

The Tongue River bulges glassy, thick, 
the pregnant line between rez and world. 
Edges blossom green into dust. 
The bridge arches but from up here looks flat. 
The river's curls holds in the whole thought 
of a people, their us and not. 
The line shifts with the push of current, 
tumble of sandbank, word of mouth. 
Here on the climb up to Lame Deer 
that fat river thins to a thread and grows 
into a shining circle as wide as the world. 
Turn around and trace it with your fingers. 
Pull it tight and feel its cut and knot.
A Quick Revision

This is my dream of the West, two thousand-five, two horses and a half acre, a double-wide trailer, and the horseflies thick. Especially down by the shallow ditch, the tepid water, the greener grasses.
Dark’s Anatomy

We hold our hurt so close under the skin,
it takes little pressure to draw out a blooming,
sullen bruise reaching at the edges
into the flesh glowing pink below
the surface. When night comes on like this,
deliberate and slow so that we’re surprised
in the first tendrils of darkness
to find ourselves enlaced, I think how
in the twilight the darkest centers
hold back the most power: the hawk on the fencepost
beside the bending road is a silhouette
seeking light, an unmoving absence that will,
when it dives into the shadow of grasses,
become somehow absolute. This is meaningless.
The hawk before diving is no less of the earth
than in the moment when claws reach below
to find flesh parting before them.
The moths in the car had so far done well chasing the brightest thing going. They had no reason to suspect that this might be a sometimes unviable strategy. At the end of the night you sleep where you find yourself, friend. Try it sometime. The moths therefore should have felt some sense of exhilaration being removed some hundreds of miles at freeway speeds, if hundreds, or miles, or freeway speeds were things they had stopped to think about before.

The people in the car could have felt a thrill in proxy for the moths and these radical revisions of horizon, had they thought about it, or known prior, driving all the afternoon towards the future of a sunset. If they had, having passed the point of sundown, they wouldn't have been surprised in the darkening car at the soft violence awakening at the back of a neck, or skidding along a forearm extended to the steering wheel, or rising from beneath the children's feet and caroming off the ceiling, diving for the dashboard, and they might have whispered some small luck out to each creature they carefully cupped to release, hundreds of miles removed, into the wind and freeway speeds, might have held the subtle flurry in the palm a moment longer on their way home.