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### RAISE UP LAKEFOG, DIVE

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RAISE UP LAKEFOG, DIVE

By

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Bachelor of Arts, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, AR, 2015

Thesis

presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Fine Arts  
in Creative Writing

The University of Montana  
Missoula, MT

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RAISE UP LAKEFOG, DIVE

Nate Duke

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## **Jumped the Clutch Knocked the Fence Down**

Heat like think hard to breathe.  
Old boys say *hot air is better than no air*.  
Killed a snake in the barn nesting  
in cool mold under haystacks.  
Broke all its eggs kept poking around  
with the shovel looking for more.  
Couldn't operate the weed whacker,  
said it was broke—got paid anyway.

Heat like engine haze in the night  
pumping water from a cow pond to sling out  
onto saplings. When my mom dies these trees  
will pay for my mortgage. Rainbows form  
above insect hosts invading the floodlights.

Heat like a thumbprint seared by the copper end  
of the garden hose, washing caked red mud off the night's machines.

Heat like lay in the yard and sweat all over  
your books get up dive-tackle one of the dogs  
see who's wetter.

## Conway People

Midmorning shadow bleats pine as Joel  
drives the RTV over a bridge of railroad  
crossies. He does not pause to spit in the creek,  
and the yellow excavator breaks open the trees.

Campfire shadow says bless you, feed me cedar.  
But didn't we get the high church good with our cling-wrapped  
toilet bowls, lying to each other  
about reading that Bible cover to cover.

Ouachita mountainshadow says get down.  
We stuck lit cigars ember-up in tobacco pipes  
and the equine dawnshadow said look away willows,  
*look away Dixieland away rolling river.*

**elsewise horseshit re the water table**

As though we're all surveyors  
and county employees slinging dip  
talking shade air. Wear that orange vest,  
you can do whatever you want to state property.

See to that which comes  
between you and the ground  
—tire salesmen, photographers,  
witnesses of Indian treaties.

Red cliffs mean with all those angles.  
This sweep says roll,  
that spire says erode. Nubbin  
of a hill on the state park map.  
Look at all this dirt on the hustle.

If you go there you're meant to feel small,  
but I'll just think what I would  
rather've done with all that earth.



## **learned misery on our behalf**

Headed to Arkansas, ride in clutching the underbelly  
of a springtime green pollen thunderhead.  
If you don't fly get smuggled under tangled  
mounds of canvas fire hose drenched

in red clay. In states made of strip malls  
and interstate oases, concrete is hotter on bare feet  
than asphalt, the asphalt so hot you'd never  
step out over it barefoot. Those puddles of haze

leading down into the road are how hot ground tells you  
it'd rather be the sky. We stole so many streetsigns  
that summer we could make sentences with them,  
communicated with wiggles and stops and one ways

built a shining fort in the woods with them. We built a fort  
that was unlike a poem because it couldn't hide and it was  
like a poem because to enter it you had to pass under  
a heavy mantel saying *yield*.

## **Flatside Pinnacle, Winter**

Ozark roads accommodate one at a time,  
one way at a time. The cell towers east  
outside of Little Rock don't interrupt  
the hawks or the wind, just blink away  
in shock at what they hear.

Down the mountain across Lake Sylvia  
the abandoned girl scout camp is neglected  
even by boys who would play at ghost chasing,  
being chased. Friend, you can't make a fire  
with the thirty-year-old you met on the internet.

A good fire starts with the sports page,  
torn and crumpled underneath twigs  
under sticks under bigger sticks  
leaned up against a log as I will show you,  
but will not expect you to recall  
as I hope you learn to subsist on cold  
Arkansas air. But our fire tonight  
is hot enough to melt the glass bottles  
that for awhile lie to us appearing cool  
and smooth in the coals under the small cathedral  
of flame. Maneuver a stick inside their mouths,  
lift them into the air and they won't drip  
like you want, but instead morph quietly earthward,  
and if you keep them in the cold air they'll shatter.

If we choose to get up and roll down the dark to the lake  
the drifters in the camper van will shuffle their corpses out  
to ask us if we smoke trees and we'd look at each other wondering

## Eating Candlewax

Backpacks tied round our ankles,  
learn the floor with our chests  
and the ceiling with our spines.  
Spotlight a see-through cricket,  
and in the small chamber our guide asks:  
*which way is out?* feel around the walls,  
press hands into every surface. We find the answer  
behind us, crawling how we came.

On the way out, I look down untaken passages.  
They come in two kinds: skinny rat-chutes  
of no return, or basilica-windows of cathedrals,  
where only water's calcite drip holds enough light  
to guess by at forms—karst, sandstone, dark air,  
guano swamp, and that archsentinel Michael  
just past where my light ends.

Someone built an elevator down here.  
We take it up into the gift shop—  
magnetic black rocks for sale. Out the window,  
a dogwood grove roofs the cavern,  
its early June hummingbirds command  
orbital patterns, boy's eyes.

## Unlike Conquest

At trawling speed over blasted red dirt forest road,  
I lean into the wheel and reach my left arm back  
to crank down the window, let the dogs get some air.  
I'd feel something about them, getting hopped around  
in the cab, but the edge of the backwoods was miles ago  
and they're dogs. As a boy I was in the house  
when a female dog was brought to the yard inhabited  
by two male dogs and the boy said to the dad  
"they're fighting over her" and the dad said, "they're dogs,  
they'll work it out. If they draw blood they'll work it out."

I drove them out there to sic the micaceous sandstone  
upstart of a rival mountain that we'd seen  
from Flatside Mountain's peak after someone had cut down  
the sapling that blocked the view south over Lake Winona.  
If you downclimb Flatside's sheer face you can find her mouth:  
a rainmade crater with floating wisps of bark fungus and sunken  
eggshells. Our intent was to feed her the head of the upstart,  
the peak of the rival mountain. The dogs and I got lost

in the self-referential logging roads en route to the enemy.  
Stopping to let them out, they hid from me behind my legs.  
I tried to buckle them in the seatbelts: bad idea. Knee driving  
and holding down each dog till I hit asphalt: good idea.  
I never taught them to sic or ride in a truck anyway.  
Consoling ourselves, maybe she doesn't have eyes,  
and doesn't know about the enemy. Maybe I'm the enemy  
crawling over her face.

**we lit old phone books and hurled them as fireballs**

Mantled over with all yellow grass of this field,  
floodplain of the Illinois River, northern Arkansas.  
A wooden stake of me is driven into the ground  
and a rope tied to that stake, it raised a white revival tent—  
intimacy with snakefangs, hope for reincarnation as bent sapling.  
Here a stream is being built to atone,  
the natural gas companies imagine,  
for many streams destroyed. I took women  
and men here, took myself howling  
at a dozen child-selves of me conjured  
by profane ritual of August heat-lightning.  
They ran at me not away. A famous rapper dreams:  
*And maybe one day we could fuck in the bank*  
I weave half my body into grass, break my own knots.

## Hatchet

Charles and I were on the bluff opposite you  
and your girl. She waved to us.  
Camping on the peak in December,  
your fire was on top of the mountain  
and ours was in the forest on the saddle.  
One I could see from the road,  
and one was too slight, wind-beaten and hid.  
Ours ate the dead, carbon pyre throwing light  
to rival cell towers 30 miles east.

We slept on the ground, blue tarp,  
damn sure big enough coal heap.  
And what was it woke us at 4 a.m.—  
you and your girl trudging down past us  
like you hadn't reckoned for night wind  
on an Ozark mountaintop.

It would be better if you admitted the earth  
was trying to get away from you.

It was our last day in Arkansas for the year,  
and what did we find at the place where you camped  
but a yet-living stump, hacked chest-high.  
You burned its crown for your little fire—  
only dead wood is happy to give heat,  
there's a reason green branches hiss.  
The paraplegic tree you burned  
which was, I recall, fine for shade  
(fine because it was a live tree, let it alone)  
mocks you with us on the wind somewhere.

**the sum is always a put-out campfire**

All I'd kill to have one thing in common  
with a cottonwood grove on a floodplain  
could fill oil drums in the yard where crucifix  
sculptures get carved open with chainsaws.

I wanted to sew my lips around the open mouth  
of apostasy in a chickenwire kiss but I'm more  
like one great white wind turbine blade chained  
to a trailer on the interstate waiting to get blown over.

This time next year I'll piss my name again in lichen,  
watch it drip off a limestone bluff. One thing I knew  
I'd get wrong was the curves of the rivers—  
when I'm in Arkansas I see every nest in every tree.

**this poem leads to the abandoned girl scout camp above Lake Sylvia**

By the narrow crest of the abyssal dam:  
steadfast as a frontier masonry chimney,  
abject as the rusted cans it hoards.  
On the slope above it will you choose  
shrimp defrosting in an iron skillet,  
nicotine stain on a bleeding fresh tattoo.

By the wide and shameful marsh around:  
My burrow was deadfall, twine, loblolly needles.  
A horde of groin ticks for you! A boy could be  
a horde of groin ticks if he did not choose daily  
to be instead hot lake mud sucking off your shoe.

By a descent into the canyon of refuse; nowhere:  
Any Ozark night belongs to the bear hunter.  
Dogfood laid up on pallets. The advance  
of Black Arrow is not threatened. He sighted  
his line in the vulnerable place, the single  
embrasure of accumulated Red Oak. Black  
Arrow forms a cross only now with every tree.

(The bleak canyon of rolled ankles)  
The convention of yellow insects  
in state park bathroom sinks.  
Student of lake bottoms! Easy  
when drained to a distant planet  
of sodden leaves, fish carbon.

By a short drive along the road of trespass:  
Student of the Ouachita forest in cold  
air. White minerals water the pooled  
creeks. Pass the lake and hang three rights.  
Blare your little horn thinking to alert  
opposing drivers and no sound's neck  
resists that executioner cold wood's silence,  
his grey and noisome guillotine.

By the black night cliffs of the dam's abutment:  
Three boys with one flashlight between  
them attempt a snaking traverse while two  
other boys and I mount straight up.  
Our ghosts; they abet your advance  
along certain cracks, dissuade you  
of particular mossy handholds.  
If you summit and find the cabins  
empty, we raided them for you.



**if I start sweating I'll take an aspirin**

When my uncle had this third heart attack, he drove  
to the morgue. Figured they'd give him a discount  
if he died in the parking lot. Grandpa had a heart  
transplant from this 18-year-old girl who they said died  
in a car wreck, but more likely when her heart was removed.  
They had both cut deals with Coronary Failure.  
I've met him twice now at the midnight crossroad east  
of Texarkana. He's always trying to collect,  
yet I remind him I can't pick stocks or horses,  
can't survive three wars, can't duel on a banjo.  
*Maybe I'll teach you to swim,* he says.

## Swimming Merit Badge Requirement 7

Make a hole in the water with your hands  
and send your body through it.

This is how I teach boys to dive.

If this lake was deeper, the strong boys  
and I could dive deeper. Near the bottom,  
the big concrete anchors with their amber  
dusts and caddis flies were built in Atlantis  
then swum here. When you arrive,  
let out some air to maintain depth, spin  
and scoop mud that's full of little cocoons,  
roving hordes of leeches.

The camp directors have no power  
here. We're alone at the bottom of this lake,  
or the lake is alone in the world. Maybe  
an enemy is in the world and we shelter  
in the lake. When my eyes feel squeezed,  
I am out of air. Devise momentum to surface.  
The way accounts that I will black out before  
my mouth breaks. My lungs count down  
with a blue abacus and my boys want to know  
how cold and deep the water is.

## **Taylor Lake Requisitions**

We give chase in an unwieldy rowboat like paddling  
a tractor bucket, a boy levers the bow into the air  
reaching after the turtle as I try to row his hands

onto its shell. Light cuts strange angles through the water  
onto our quarry and confounds us. We see the turtle  
always at once above and below itself. A boy is a hunter  
until he is a herpetologist. The turtle has big claws  
and extra eyelids. A crowd of boys assembles.  
We take a long look and drop it back in the water.

On the north shore of the lake is a big frog we might hunt  
next, and if you, being strong, dive to the bottom of our lake  
with a bucket, you can dredge black mud to the surface  
and covering your body with it might get caught, studied.

### **Swimming Merit Badge Requirement 6c**

I guess water wants down your lungs  
    as much as it wants to describe  
your every increment of latitude  
    as you slide along its equator  
south away from air.

My custom is to hold my eyes still  
    just under the water's end. But I don't  
belong here and can't stay.  
    I think if I could see up from the water  
like lying upside down, hung off the couch cushion,  
    I could imagine life walking around  
on the ceiling. I could imagine the world like the place  
    where you don't stay long, because it  
gets colder as you go deeper and if you try leaving  
    you might bust your head on the underside of a rowboat  
or your body could fail you  
    and fill with air.

### **Melita Island Navy**

Load aluminum hulls with baling buckets and tie knots to hold, arm your sailors and oarsmen with the red instruments of rescue. Return in time to witness the host of judges assembled by a boy skipping a stone, performing any act requiring skill. Show the harbormaster the design of your armada's flag and he will weave it for us to raise.

### **Aquatics Director and Head Lifeguard Supervise Free Swim**

Boys, they leave socks everywhere. They balk at 'beginner'. They want the water propulsion devices and find them. They brought enemies along with them. They choose the big paddle. They are sharks or whales or cops or robbers. They want to be tossed like dwarves. Aquamom they call me. They need to knock out requirement #7 without diving. Arming themselves as fools, they play at drowning. They do not cry on my dock. They never fall into the pit toilet but would go down with a rope and oil lamp. They are Squirtle and Psyduck so I'm Blastoise. They want mom both here and not. They swim under opaque water as total motion until they stop.

## **Flag Retirement Ceremony, Scout Camp**

Some compete to be blue nylon  
as it melts open to red.

As a boy I saw that patriot blood  
fall out and didn't grandpa say every

man regrets not being a soldier.

When you work here you burn  
the flags open once a week.

I held the golden shovel, turned  
it into the fire, caught a little

of that black nylon-slime on it.  
There are men in this camp

who will huff the melted air  
rising off the flags. I hold my breath

for my country, run up the hill  
after that high summer orange moon

salute the stiff flag we posted on its face.

## **Melita Island Free State**

A Belgian flag hangs out front the mess hall  
of an island boy scout camp in Montana.

Someone wanting to empathize with god  
could go to that island, take its circumference

identify its invasive plants by the ones that look ugly there,  
count the deer and wonder if they're trapped.

If you do this you won't find the cairn underwater  
on the north shore. Perhaps it was built in a spirit

of preemptive blasphemy. Knowing you, I believe  
you would have the wherewithal and ingenuity

to weave the small armada of rescue to pursue  
the stranded doll's canoe in the cold bay that faces

Wild Horse Island at sunset. The Belgian harbormaster  
could teach you the bowline knot, mooring hitch, how to cut

over breakers. This is a camp for boys and as such operates  
on the principles of ordeal and tribulation so when you embark

I will raise from the mainland a wake to ride up over your gunwales,  
testing your hulls.



**the life raft built from insect wings has no paddles**

Act like daddy ever took you camping.  
A good drowner can fight lakewater  
for 60 seconds. Could you pull one wing  
off a horsefly and let it loop loops in your  
hand. Act like you never sat cross-legged on  
beloved's bedroom floor, drowning. Act like  
the blue quivers I hold full of boys won't  
outfill themselves in the world, outdive you  
in any lake. Forked hands of the drowning,  
a realm apart from still legs. Act like you  
laid up honor on any name. I have never  
touched the hands of my brother's sons  
and I will never drown. But did you listen  
when the rusted lake keel spoke. Act like dead  
shelter of caddis flies, their black larvae.  
Act like the wide eyes of drowners ever  
look to you. Live invisible and beg  
for lakewater. Novice in drowning; look  
to what fills. Act like a poem is other  
than an unwinged horsefly, drowning.



### **found in the harem of the manticore**

Fat leaves of the southern magnolia:  
fine altar stones for a temple made from  
live oak deadfall twigs, wheatgrass twine.  
My clever boy his root canyon battlements,  
loblolly needle floors, Blair witch doll warriors.  
Dawner of civilization, speak over assembled  
forest-floor ephemera its de jure theocracy  
and legislate with steel and flint. Of my first  
dozen fathers one was the derision of black gum  
bark in the face of my small blazes.

Captain Hook was tall and strong, could  
grow a beard, order about swarthy pirates so  
when Pan rides down my mainsail on his sword  
I catch him by the roof of his left eyesocket with  
this hook. Clotted shock blood in his brain freezes  
his boysome grin even after his head is cut and flung—  
catch, Wendy. I envied Hook until I became him,  
standing midship in the aluminum rowboat,  
orchestrating lakeboys with an oar cutlass.

A drone cam pans slow over carpet seas,  
grasslands. This windowsill mountain range.  
The good guys and bad guys obvious  
as the contorted galaxy inhabiting this empty  
bedroom. A boy schemes dominion in the temple of play  
only to find a white-spotted fawn asleep in its cupola.

I told lakeboys I knew every poem  
ever written. They believed me because  
all poems amounted to the wake of a paddle stroke,  
the 3p.m. thunderstorm that comes in  
over the archery range, the bite of a horsefly  
and its yellow insides,  
a tall man yelling from a rowboat.

### **I agree with everything**

A postcard from the future, mailed from the lost island of the patriarchs: tall men setting one another on fire to briefly light their dark. I gather entrails and from them we prophesy. I sent the postcard to a boy in your time and he doesn't drown anymore.

We founded the island as a little world for courage, where all our daddies could kill your daddies and drink mead from their skulls, a place they would do that for us.

### **Bowline Knot, Sunk Yellow Snorkel**

The cup full of lakepower was poison.

The lake collapsed under the fir trees.

We are seen by the lake's eyes—they are woven  
into naiad reeds growing on the west shore.

The lake collapses

and passed through you as tears. Wellwater  
passed through you as sweat. The lake  
was fed. The lake passed through me  
as imagined dominion. The lake and I are sated.

The lake could pin us under the dock,  
fasten us to the bottom. The lake is jealous  
for our lungs, and I am jealous for the lake.  
I want you to ask me for the lake. I want  
to make you drink this cup of lakepower.  
I dip my feet out of the water to test the air.

I surrender my air.

I relinquish my air.

I wash my hands of air

in a basin of deep lakewater.

I drink from the basin and collapse out of the lake.

### **Paddle Stroke: Two Whirlpools**

Without need of a way:  
    yellow grasses lap up trail.

To the depth of accumulated trees:  
    Lie again to my face, circles.

Lower slopes and the way they hide the peak.

I wanted to be Paul Newman, swallow eggs  
and float my laurels over a pool of yolk vomit.

For the end, a blue creek will crawl under a stone.  
    For now, blue creek spawns under moss.

Summer was a canoe's wake.

Folded skin of a lanced blister: a surplus.

Make jagged the keel and match my stroke.

I knew I'd be reborn as six empty bottles rattling  
in a truckbed on the forest road.

**this poem has a copy of your house key**

I've observed certain people engaging sensibility  
like black flies orbiting a 12\$ salad on the patio  
of the new restaurant. What will your companion  
think of your vicious swatting hand or the folly  
of your tense disregard. If this poem was in your  
kitchen at night you would pretend it makes the sounds  
of the one who is meant to be there lest you go looking  
with a flashlight and that quivering haft-gripped baseball bat  
whose name is instinct. When my home was invaded  
I forgot where the light switches were. When it happens  
to you, grow a third hand to touch all the walls  
searching for a light to read by.

## **Hermit**

I said 'witness Ajax' or 'the inutile paratrooper  
of the forest is your aborted brother' or  
'the reason your dog seizes in its dreams:  
it's fighting your pain and losing'  
but you could tap me good in the shoulder,  
knock me off my riverstone bench  
into wet cedar needles and breathe all over my fire  
looking for embers but it's your fire now  
and if I had raised you, you would've thought  
to bring dryer lint, charcloth, something to speed a kindling.



## SELF PORTRAIT AS DRIVER

The lake crawled into my driveshaft and locked the axles.  
Composure as mechanical frequency of I-beams, steel

railroad bridge. Its crescendo met with a rubber mallet  
woman. Could I be drug across town tied to the rear axle

of a Bronco? Eyes strung from the rearview mirror like dice.  
Goodbye traction control, goodbye loose gravel.

The nation's forests or their ransom: payable to the fire giant  
at the dead-drop spring. Mom flips dawn silhouettes in a glowing

frypan made of I-40 blacktop and hot grease jumped as the green  
yellow hummingbirds of your granddaughter's first June. If it was me

cooking I'd beat the dawns to charm the dowager empress  
of the galaxy out of her concertina wire ballgown. If it was me

I'd offload my dreams at your feet as a dozen 2017 Tacomas,  
forest green, stick-shift, running boards lifted axles. White tendons

of dehydrated meat stuck between teeth as irreverence. Some people  
pretend it's ravaged beauty or loss and I call it a game,

a competition. Drift the rear axle and throw road dust higher  
than early sun, the creekfog it woke. Pasture dust camouflages

livestock and this smell could be the end of your brake pads or oil  
leaking onto the drive shaft or that semi in front of you hurtling

down the mountain pass, the end of its brake pads. I once crossed the country  
without a beautiful woman in the passenger and swore at the rearview

never again. I need someone to pretend to believe me when I lie  
the nuclear plant is a cloud factory and all this bambi-eyed roadkill

is somehow tumbleweed, a log, refrigerator box, illusion. Steadfast  
as a 4Runner with a locking differential. Fastest I ever drove was 140

in Trent's Altima. Fastest I ever stood out of an Infiniti's sunroof was 120  
in New Mexico, another boy driving steady. I know a gelded 2012 Camaro

that's never been driven over 75. Each of these lines had to last more than 10 miles  
on Highway 89 through Utah and Arizona, had to cast out over the desert

like when it rains enough the drops congeal to falling streams  
creeks like mountain roads their angles of dynamite like soft

shoulders, the rumble strips on every edge of road meaning

what you can't drive away from. A shinbone loses to a trailer hitch  
or a trailer hitch beats a shinbone. Reverse gear has the most torque.  
Sometimes it rains enough to shuck rain off the windshield.

### **Kendall Ghost Town, Hilger MT**

When a thrall summer assembles up in need  
from my summoning circle, my soft poet's  
hands will be strong enough again to cup  
lakes. What is not honored by the hands  
of laborers? The poem will not friction  
your skin like the mooring line attached  
to the rowboat, floating away in squall.  
The poem will not be the delicate  
endodontic drills requiring precision,  
but it may be soft gums awaiting pain.  
Should a poet's hands be strong?  
Have we shorn the hands of poets,  
lopping them off like crepe myrtle  
branches. Who collects the living hands  
of poets? Solomon Koko, champion  
hand-driller of Kendall gold mine could  
with hammer and one steel drill 45 inches  
into a boulder's heart in 30 minutes  
before a host of spectators. Shall I enumerate  
the ways a poem is unlike Solomon Koko,

his beautiful hands. I hope at least a poem could be  
the cyanide pads of that mine, leaching gold.

## **Missouri River**

The deer on the road to school saunter  
from novel to passé to fresh grass,  
among them a young male brained by his own  
malformed antler, which, instead of rising  
in confounding utility, cancers down and out  
his lateral eye socket. He turns his whole body  
to look another way. I wrote this out an airplane  
window seeing halfway the earth.

**this poem is the tactile intuition of your best lover (I.)**

Rain is kept from the hellmouth  
by the roof of the shed at the base  
of the yellow hill, a yellow made  
of Highway 200 larches.

Putting your toe in a portal  
as if to test the temperature  
of its vertical fluid won't function  
with the instantaneous transfer of  
a mirror. Your passage requires  
a total occasion.

The mischievous portal will collect  
your conceivable molecules and at its outlet  
assemble them by its own design.

The trickery of a jinn-wish, ironic  
misinterpretation. What you came for  
was transfer. Fold up and sharpen molten  
silver quickly now into a weapon for the blood  
of creatures where you are will be fed or set  
aflame by you. I bellow the forge of one  
mountain in each possible realm.

The easiest way to deprive a being  
of recognized sentience is to refuse  
its sounds the pale honor of language.

As humans we presume the eyes of a  
creature are too fine of instruments  
to be distanced greatly from its brain.  
What shades would be lost in transfer if  
our eyes looked up from knee bones.  
The eyes of creatures in the realm you  
invade are easily shut. Find enough light

to blind them by its reflection off your blade.

The ultimate model of subjugation is the  
mortification of horses, led around by their  
forcibly opened mouths. Humiliate a creature  
to bear you away across this realm.

Ford these rivers of serpents and hope  
your mount's legs will move proportionate  
fluid, its flanks bear up snake fangs and  
the weight of snake bodies on your behalf.

**this poem is the tactile intuition of your best lover (II.)**

Fragment for a cogent masculinity:  
scented candles marketed to women,  
I juggle three of them lit, flame as their pivot.  
Daddy dismissed a glass door with his wine  
body and severed the beer nerve in his thumb  
opening a glass table and I intend to bleed gin  
on a 20\$ candle's glass to be like him.

If a fragment could end my catechism:  
Lakewater is dark at night. If a boy you preferred  
alive was under that water, it'd be the same as being  
buried in wet sand. Below a harvest moon I'd go out,  
a submarine in the night of all lakewater to see  
how this moon looked, sauced over with extra clouds.  
The lot of the adventurer: teased hypothermic.  
Nightwater is so convincing, how can you not stroll  
out over it, scree-stepping the leftover day waves.

Fragment as itinerant deceiver:  
I bear about me a father shell like  
if you and I were three squat boys in a  
black duster coat disguised as a full man.  
With you as the legs, I as the face  
will infiltrate such company.

## Midnight Snack

There's a great black pig in a yard on Edith Street.  
Street deer have grey spots that look like mahout  
ticks riding side-saddle. Animals feel

some way about living. It may be they watch me  
assessing my motives or capacities, thinking if they stand  
still I won't watch them. *The moon never asked you  
a question about the sanctity of life.* The animals  
are sleeping now, and I do not imagine they dream of much,  
but when I think on someone far away they call me.

The black and red box elder crawling across the ceiling  
is going to fall into my mouth while I'm asleep.  
Its brain is electrochemical, its body a synapse,  
its moment of consciousness the long grip of my throat.

## **VERY QUITE THIS TOWN SUCH**

The good alderman in the sad town thinks  
only of the days before asphalt  
blight, street signs tearing  
thick glares in the night. It is always  
a steady sunset and he is always heading east,  
sight thrown round by red sun blasting  
the rearview. Everyone has covered  
their hands with their eyes.

Some people feel a way you cannot change.

If I get born in that town as crippled dogs  
could I change how you feel? Were I made  
as tramps and transients could you learn  
to see what a home is? If I arose  
as a paid-off house with a lawn of  
Bermuda grass could it send you back  
into the world or would you try to stay  
and get born a neighbor to me?



**the basket of deplorables contained five loaves and two fish**

A ballot of well-stuck nightcrawler worms  
bleed red if you know where to stick them.

The land of your enemy is two buckets  
on the riverbank, a yewpole twine and roofnail  
hook. The green reek of Maywater— inutile  
troutlivers dispersed along graysand beaches.  
Narrow puddles in the rivets of a concrete  
boat launch.

I sear my hands on the engine furnace door  
of the river barge. Who will sink these broken  
oaths? These bodies'd be as we recalled them,  
upright and hid away in their woods, camouflaged  
in their holler. The slow vessel tugs a hefty meat  
catcher lifting spongy bodies to bob along.

The bloated corpses of poems roll over slow  
in this trudging wake. A genesis of barnacles  
and freshwater bivalves. The private apocalypse,  
or opening, of mud dwellers. The iron maiden  
of this riverbottom, its black spines, its inescapable bars,  
our words a dredger cage.

## **New Digs**

Everything in my backyard:  
two windowpanes, melt-drip,  
a small shed and a big one and a grill,  
tracks in the snow, wispy trees, a possible  
nest, wire fence, blue fence, neglected clothesline  
(maybe I'll be well again)  
fantasies of empire, combustion engines.

When it rains on the front porch,  
I am reborn as thirty derivative poems  
of ideal rain flooding your slush  
pile— I contain no gems (their value  
arbitrary) but I do have a wet  
consideration: transparent yet it holds  
the blue light of every American screen.

Performed by a lover's quarrel heard  
from two blocks away: saturated  
our universal lexicon of passion  
into a syllable that could mean hot ash,  
half-shoveled snow.

**arrived only to demote the fine sentinels**

I had hoped we could, together,  
patrol the streets, watchers of gravity-trails  
in the orange town. As one under orders  
to lie about trees, bodies—  
I encode for you a cypher  
of viable misdirections.

The dominant party in a tet â tet may  
assume a servile posture to create,  
for the subservient party, the illusion  
of an egalitarian power dynamic.

How she came to be seated cross-legged  
on the blue rug in the infernal chamber  
portending a dead yellow rose taped  
to the door entered by me to find a white  
card forgotten on a white shelf with secret message;

*There is no card for this.*

I read it standing in the apartment-cum-mausoleum,  
went outside for my vigil set in cold grass.

## **APROPOS THE WET SNOW**

*Inspired by Joy Harjo*

My whiteman watch is silent  
unlike me throwing pinecone  
reserves into frozen snow for  
craters to match the deer tracks  
left by animals.

The mornings marbled over  
with half-yet-too-much light.  
This is a new winter and is,  
for me, a conduit for nothing  
else. Magnetism of hip and  
tail bones with the street ice.

The mind is soundproofed by  
snow. Apropos the snow, no one  
wants to make sounds. Low crunch  
of ice floes colliding in the itinerant  
river. Can the sun forsake? We know,  
I think, that the earth can scorn.

If I have kinship with an animal  
of burden it is a forest green Tacoma  
dragging me out of the ice.

**the way I like to touch a dog is by the teeth**

Look, I just think 200 years from then,  
those proud kills of dogs, their victims,  
would still be dead. I know it myself.  
Dead cats laid unbidden on the gate  
to the yard, dog supplicant. Fair distributors,  
my boys and I wrapped them in trashbags  
and slung them as Davids, Olympiad corpse-  
toss. I see now stray scavengers choking  
on a feast of black plastic,  
animal death a slow ripple  
in a stagnant pool of ironed creekwater.

## **AND OUR TIGHTENED CORNEAS**

Masculine valence in the foyer, a window biased  
for dawn-sounds like starved chicks in the fir-nest  
and contrived desire limits perception, a street opened  
wide to embers, apocalypses personalized for bicycle  
wheels, their vulnerable rubber, open spokes.

The structure of you could be evaporated icicles  
dispersed over many streams, clouds. Smoke  
is coming out of the mailbox now and I am to blame.

Oil mixes with black saltwater in the street  
and we are responsible. Boneless hands of halide  
streetlamps stroke the air until our eyelids.

## GORGONS ON ONE WRIST AND BOTH ANKLES

“where was it that I read about a man condemned to death saying or thinking, an hour before his death, that if he had to live somewhere high up on a cliffside, on a ledge so narrow that there was room only for his two feet—and with the abyss, the ocean, eternal darkness, eternal solitude, eternal storm all around him—and had to stay like that, on a square foot of space, an entire lifetime, a thousand years, an eternity—it would be better to live so than to die right now!”

-Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*

### *Stheno*

“local poet as airboat in the everglades”  
“circled ‘round the block ‘til I heard the banger”  
“didn’t shuffle down this gene pool just to recycle”

and like good porn it doesn’t claim to be a promise.

When I disembark my ivory palanquin  
at the last house with living plants

I learn good to hold water instead of floating in it  
just to warp.

Uncopyrighted good material rolled into a snowball  
and left in the freezer for summer. Nobody owns  
the sight of fat whimsical barrels stacked in the bar,  
striations of wood in the ceiling panels of the sauna  
that are different friends.

My pail of blueberries; a good soak in several waters,  
a single totemic eyebrow and its code,  
a black dog whose celebrated teeth.

I was once made uncomfortable taking  
a sexy lady to a music festival so I kick  
the can of leering now at your own corral  
of bodies horsethief.

I chose to live a catalogue of miens  
that force immediate decisions. The heal  
for apathy is colluding with others to act  
in the stead of your tapwater and here’s  
looking at you.

### *Euryale*

The music in the building is better than what’s  
in my head but I carry my temple everywhere  
as a lake its skippable stones.

My summary departure could be that spring-fed  
river staying 52 degrees all summer who now drips fame  
for letting a boy's dive flow from a liquor bridge down  
into paraplegia as a botched note of mercy.

My summary departure as a celestial body  
is the speeding chunk of satellite detritus burglarizing  
the dawn window of the Mars mission and the alarm  
sounds forever back to ground control.

*Medusa*

When I get my teeth like a dog I won't carry a knife. When I  
get my tongue like a dog I won't clean and maintain my body.  
When I write it's because I can't shit in the yard like a dog.

The plastic pumpkin of my empathy distributes candy  
one night a year. If they'd built me up god you know  
there'd be a machine by which every mass-casualty natural  
disaster bought for you and I a few more feet of consciousness.



**ran home in time to dump orange night into a basin of city sky**

And from their confluence what river of blue Ozark water will spring  
and from what confluence of Ozark waters do I spring—  
Is there a way to meet the river but not  
get drug out to sea?

Christo and Jeanne-Claude meant to cover miles of Arkansas River headwaters  
with silver canopies and I would've ended up some fallen-away bluff  
hung with icicles.

I meant to get born a storm drain and missed.

I meant to get born a spillway over the reservoir  
held by the mound of all poetry raised into a dam—  
so when that dam floods over with spring melt  
everything rolls off through me into the open canyon  
where pine and cedar saplings cling to the walls.