

1998

Pawn Shop

Dennis Hockman
The University of Montana

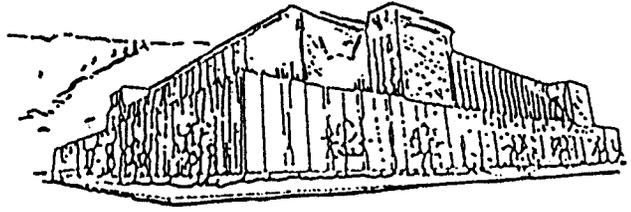
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Pawn Shop

by

Dennis Hockman

B.S. Towson University, Maryland 1995

Presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

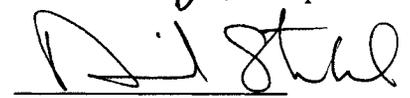
Master of Fine Arts

The University of Montana

1998

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Pawn Shop

“ . . . down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.”

--W. B. Yeats

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The poem "Ritual Scarification" first appeared in *Cutbank*.

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The Thief
for A. Q. L.

Before the chickens scratch
what's left of the yard,
I gather the pieces of broken
pottery. Mr. Bigglesby
is hanging from the ceiling,
but do not confuse any of this
with morning or moment.

Rescue is a motive
and different resembles an idea.

That doesn't mean
we are anything alike.

I gather the leaves and watch the children
put them in a cardboard
box. I arrange the leaves by color
and weigh them
against the carcasses of fire

flies. Truth is
there were no chickens,
no monkey, and Mr. B
has loosened his collar
and red striped tie.

Let the music begin.
Let it replace
the meanings I leave you.

On the evening news
I hear that the dollar has gained
against the yen
and is now worth
one hundred and seventy three faces--

they are symmetrical
and we fold them into mushrooms
or stalks of broccoli
that look like mushrooms

but green. If she could have thought
of anything I wished it would be
engine and horse rib
or the look that means

it's time I went home.

I. Confessions of a Lounge Singer

Finding You in a Chinese Mural

For the past seven minutes
I have been walking back and forth
across China, noting thought process,
tenor and emotive value.
When the river we slept in felt like morning
I made us eggs and chocolate cookies
in last night's coals, left seven or eight hours
completely blank.

In a temple in none of the books
and not always in the same place
we meet a holy man. With a brush
and red ink, he has written a poem
on the bottom of a child's feet. The symbols
are backwards and still wet when
she steps onto the blank pages of his book.

It looks distant, the small hole
we find between one of the trees
and the hill behind it. At our feet
you discover a piece of torn canvas.
In the other room a monkey
drags a sack and all along this was yesterday.
The paint yellow-green then deep blue
a slow blur with the changing light.

On the edge of the table, the knife
is almost sharp. The fire we walk from
real enough to burn and the words that
return to me like words are completely blank.
Years I cannot cut or singe away
from the painted surface of my skin.

Abstract Life

It's like faded metal. An atmosphere.
And nobody really lives there.
The houses are built of mud
and straw as if they were meant to be
temporary. When you move toward me it is
as if the branch of a willow were dipping
into a quiet eddy--moving into the future
and back out again finding a place that feels
like nothingness would. And because we never happened,
when we meet it will be like saying *yes*,
like learning to speak all over again.

Monsoon

This moment is part of something larger,
the broken bed keeping us awake,
the shape of my body against the body in your head.

The woman who tends the small grocery
keeps patrons a few minutes longer
re-inventing her personal story of last summer's monsoon.

All this time I have been forgetting,
forgetting to lie, forgetting that there were
days when I believed the wind would have worn

your skin if the letting were like lamp oil.
You see we've inherited this logic, and you've finished
all the bourbon. Some water, this capsule, maybe morning?

Something About Liquid Desires

Near the top of my window
I hung a plant that requires no care
at all. It's true. For years I've watched it
live without soil and soak
what water it needs from the air.
That would be nice

like the day in the basement
of the Hirschorn, or was it the Philips,
when we sneaked away from the sudden rain
hiding our soggy ice cream cones
and drank expensive red wine
and bits of cork from the bottle
with De Kooning and Pollock.

It wasn't the first time,
or the last, or significant
in any other way, but we kissed.
Our clothes and hair were soaked
and even though you swore
you hated Dali, we left a puddle
where your eyes ran into my mouth.

Excavating

On our hands and knees we dig--shortening the days.
You find part of a speaker, an antenna, transistors, a dial.
Here a cat skull. A jeweled broach. I pin it to your collar.
One pile for broken pottery, another for melted silverware.

I find a woman's pelvic bone and remember when I put my lips
to her shoulder. That night she told me she was pregnant
and I left for good. The evidence leads us--death by fire.
You press into a square inch of dust and respond, "she was lonely."

We arrive at the beginning, details inside a picture frame--
fire, the skin of the vase she dropped in the middle of the night
touching our palms, our skin touching the past. The red heels
we found fit you and truly I wish you had been born. Childishly,

you piece the hi-fi back into a song that is fifty-five years old
and I remember all the words we begin to dance.

Sophia
the little redhead
has learned
to make the best
Manhattans

Her mother and I
still don't understand
the shapes
we press together
but we try

Yesterday we spent the afternoon
spraying a hose
into the air
so we could watch the water
swing open
But it was still an accident
the color we made
greed and loneliness
her husband in Tuscany with a bell-hop

a torn Budweiser label
left on a chair
a little stick figure pressed into the forest
floor
orphans gathering splinters, crowding into a doorframe.

Confessions of a Lounge Singer

Twenty four hours and I tell you
I love you. We do not matter. Slip and no
connection, on the rocks, and taxi money.

When we were first married, hungry and so was I
inside the night after night after night. Again
I've fallen from the piano.

Falling piano, martini, red light.
Claude, live here and know something.

And "yes" no more. Two somethings
tied to a log: ballerina, rain.

On a window silence. Do you feel
as if these words have become emblems
for distress, for hopelessness? Do you feel

loss? I fate the obvious. Little scar, you've bitten
the sense of pleasure. Again. The tried look,
the practiced reason, the euphemism, the and,

and photographs. The woods settle back
into frame. Places settle, surrendering to their meaning:
Dawson Creek, Watson Lake and Grande Prairie

have given their names to the maps.
Minnie Mouse is a small doll
on the shelf where I once lived.

The one true yes is all alone. I've lost its formula.
The formula for newness, for covering us in lightning.

I tried green-orange into the blue. I tried stop.
I tried begin the man
who falls and begins to sing the sharkskin.

No. I do not want to play
this little life. The lightning fish, the, and motorcycle.
Fun. Yes! Wrong. Gun, gun, service.

Uptown the car you've finally found.
Get in! One her, we go
too far. And stop to touch.

Out the meaning--the we are smart enough.
Even windex colored lemonade, box car
nectar. Sometimes, it hurts to swallow.

Lie down, hold this silence in your mouth
and oh. And oh! And oh, oh, shh, it is a dream.
Inside a dream I dream to remain transparent

Xylophone

“ . . . for we know not what we should pray for as we ought:
but the spirit itself maketh intercession for us
with groanings which cannot be uttered.” Romans 8:26

I.

And somehow it lasted,
last night, like a close-up
photograph of a dragonfly frozen
so perfectly above a bank of noxious
weeds that it clears the blur of its own
wings. Or like the snapshot of a buoy
on your wall, caught at half-bob
in a grey northern sea.

II.

The taxidermist that lives below me is playing
his xylophone again. I hear him
in the back room. He whistles between each note
trying to match his breath
to the bars. He's good from what I've
seen, able to create eyes filled at once
with fury and panic and love. I catch myself
waiting for the bobcat or elk to blink.
I put my hand to her mouth
but the wolfhound in window
does not give me her tongue.

III.

Therefore, I believe that if you and I
are quick enough, we
could capture something real
with only our hands--a grouse for example.
It takes the two of us to corner the bird,
one of us on either side of our bed-
sheet. It lives in the garage on less
than a handful of grain each day,
but I still leave my camera on your night
stand with the shutter open all night
to see if we streak like stars.

Painting: a Sonnet

Night falls in the basement, unfinished
and the white candles begin to throw
their thin light. You remove your robe
continuing to smoke.

I do not watch your face. A faint
red glow lights your shoulders
and with my forefinger I spread
a thick vein of crimson between
your rib line and the curve of your breast.
You turn away as if I'd spoken

and I begin your face--first a frozen
exoskeleton of a potato bug, then
a coffee can full of spent Marlboro's,
a wingless dove, foreshortened footprint.

History Lesson

Sound is kept going by a simple device--
she makes words like mixing fuel
with spark, compression, and lubrication.
She puts her hand on mine. She writes prayers

for assurance in the frost
on my windshield. A woman she met once
had taught her--two for driving, four for harvest,
for leaving, seven, only one for listening

I cannot hear. The cassette
we bought at the truck stop is over, the role
of film brand-new. Outside
Shenandoah pushes against the glass.

The road steals rubber from the radials.
Every few miles, historical markers;
someone slept here, thousands died--children--
armed with heirloom rifles, mom's cobbler, and stolen tobacco.

Ahead a patch of ice I see in time.
In a churchyard a black
propeller marks the grave
of a local airman lost over the Marne.

For near an hour nothing moves
in the forests or fields our thoughts
divide. I press on the steering wheel
repeatedly, blowing the horn, hoping

to startle a whitetail into the road or a face
from behind a curtain. Behind us a noise
something we missed, like leaves. . . like
footsteps. . . like leaves. . .different interpretations.

And I can't help but look too long. What?
she asks, but should know the answer.
Again nothing. We keep secrets
from everyone, especially each other.

A man on the roadside holds a piece
of cardboard box on which someone's written
the word *Nashville*. *Nashville*. How long has he been waiting?
How long will he continue?

She points to where I am already
looking, a waterfall frozen in the rocks
near Harper's Ferry. She pulls ice cubes
from a convenience store cup

and puts them to her mouth. But
there is a simpler point to make.
I turn the volume all the way
down--a ritual by which I've learned

to combat silence. We can only hear
the Potomac. Today we'll take
no pictures. In the home I've imagined
for us every light is left on.

Glow and Center

A telescope left in open in a field.
A field directing starlight from the house.

None-the-less: the house.
Her diary, his workshop.

The physicist sleeps conscious of the pressure
air exerts on his face and her shoulders.

Her shoulders radiate pale blue--
she is a china doll. It is a cold night

and she cannot be breathing.
The night is full of sound--

a low wind, the pop and steady rush of an
acetylene torch, small dry crunches and

squeaks--field mice in the snow. The sound of
yes, she is breathing. Heterocera.

He argues that everything has a center
not only mathematically. She will return

to the Family Bible and thumb
through the pages pausing at the Death Moth,

the Great Purple Hairstreak, the Mourning Cloak.
Everything he says has a center.

He feels himself aging. The light on her shoulders
aging; the light on hilltop, the hilltop

greying by degrees. By degrees the forest
disappears, the forest and equations for measuring

its density. The lines are dotted and faint,
milky white the words in her diary--

“How long has it been since we’ve traveled by boat?”
and “A moving room is its own compartment of light.”

“compartment of light” she mumbles through sleep
and he records her mumblings for her as best he can.

The oriental carpet is threadbare where it has been folded.
Acrylic flakes from the landscapes on the wall. The landscapes

resemble stasis, a flat reduction of gesture and pigment.
A silk robe draped over the arm chair, silk the color

of mallard, of evening fir stands, the color of ocean
before storm or after. The hall closet is lined with boots, heels,

suede in fringes hangs from a wooden hanger.
A window. A moving room. The red lightbulb

in the basement followed by a rusted chain. Steps
down to the dirt floor, to the folded sheet covering photographs

of footprints in cement, in sand, in the snow.
Underground flowers through winter. The light attracts a dormant

moth to its center, to the glow both predictable and moving.
He arranges the footprints inside her, inside her

blue chalk outline. Pulling a frayed string,
he reveals the fluorescence inside begonias and chrysanthemums.

Runaway Truck Ramp

Outside in the movement
we make--there is one thing;
we cannot stop it moving.
There are men who beat their knuckles
broken and run whispering into

traffic, *I give you myself,*
or *I love you*, and eventually,
You fucking bitch! How many times
have you waited for evaporation?
How many huckleberries

could we fit? In the pocket
of the jacket I never wear
we have something
in common: my breath
has become identical to yours.

Minutes before 5 a.m. a preacher wakes
from sleeplessness and reaches
between his wife's legs. He thinks
he has an excuse to smash his fists.
The last hundred million moments

will be the most expressive. No matter
how deep you carve you won't be able
to uncover the deer you've left behind.
Therefore, enclosed is a paintbrush. And.
Enclosed is a paintbrush. Listen,

it is August. Monday through Friday
and South America falling off the map.
Let's say orange symbolizes uncertainty
and that yellow means red. Let's say tomorrow
and a full tank of gas. Let's say we'll dance

again, that things just are that way,
there is no moon, there are no stars, the sky
is cloudless. Let us give a name
to the place you and I stopped
for photos and beer and codeine.

Reservoir

Even seagulls avoid the mussels
I discover
in the manmade lake

hundreds of miles
from any ocean
I want

to steam them anyway
wrap them with wet leaves
cover the pile

with coals
But you warn me
against it

ruin my fire
and matches
The day we swam here

in the reservoir
my boxers barely fit you
they hung at your hip bones

exposing the tattoo
you promised
was only for me

It was strange
neither you nor Henry
initiated the kiss

but you borrowed mouths
from one another
to smile when you saw me watching

It is late
The geese are settling for the night
and mist is settling

above the water
every road out closes at dusk
Tomorrow

our footprints in the mud
will be fossils
of the accidental shore

“I am beautiful naked”
you tell me
Tell me “The cold

has its own language”
And I believe you
The wind

can make all the sounds
and leaves
they’ve learned a few words

Lake-water understands it now
sometimes
sometimes rivers.

I keep every feather
collect mussel shells
break them all for your feet

Five Reasons for Making a Mule
for J. W.

One: You call collect from *Corpus Christi*
Communion, bathwater, blue: the images
come to me and I see you at the base of a mountain
in the shadow of a statue; I replace
Christ with Rio and a set of windchimes
hung from the balcony pretending
that magic could exist without us.
I remember the baby pigeon we kept all winter
feeding it worms from a hand puppet's cardboard beak.
She fell in love with our sock monkey.
And by the time her wings had begun
to sprout out of sunflower and styrofoam,
breezes from the harbor had taught her to sing.
A neighbor leaves her windows open
during snow or windstorms and listens.
This song drifts into her apartment.
I watch her go to the shower. I watch her
dancing in the kitchen.

Two: Part of us is already in Mexico.
When the sun begins to rise I will wake you.

Three: Science. A small discovery
in the bed
of your parent's truck. As children, we
lay skin to skin pointing to clouds: a tombstone,
a matador, a mail truck. And when your father
went away he left a few shirts
with mother of pearl buttons, some Christmas lights
on the stair rail. He left a basement full of nails
the day he went to get the paper and became
a sudden noise like a screen-door
blowing on its hinges.
A message on the answering machine
sounded like him, just wanted to say *Hi*.
Who decided the shape
we'd use to represent the heart?

Four: I have decided to add these words
to the list I've been keeping of ones to avoid:
tea cup, breast, pussy, shard, soul, shimmer.
Also primordial, twinkle, tremble
and blowjob will be spoken sparingly
and almost never written. The thick
layer of paint you left on the canvas
is finally dry and the bowl of fruit
has resurrected hundreds of insects.
I sold the concertina and your bed frame,
put red light bulbs in all the sockets,
bought a book with pictures of horses.
Should I lie to your father and tell him
that I love you, that I know how to fish,
tell him that I've learned the difference
between donkey and deer and mule?

Five: I was never a burden to you.
Forgive me this wrong.

II. Hole in the Root Cellar

Procedure

There is a hole in the root cellar
and the boy who is missing an eye
speaks to it; he whispers into the floor:
prisons, envelope, envelop.

His mother calls him from corners,
Jonas, come here, Jonas, and his dog
paces at his feet. It has brought him
a woman's finger.

He sucks it and skins the number three
away from his face. Says, My name is Ruby.
My name is Nancy. The skeletons of an orchestra
play the low sonata that he has kept

burning. And from the end of a string
he has stretched the skins.
He eats another thorn and thinks
flower and ripple, he has found his

reflection, iris grows from the mirror. A balding
woman stands from an unlit corner and walks
toward him. She begins to sing, she believes
that sound is enough. He points his face

into the end where the voice comes
and tells her that he knows where Mother lives
and God. He undresses. He kisses her.

He bleeds. And how nice. La mano
cornuda, she says, and caution.
When he wakes he shaves
the antlers from his hands.

A Painter Explores the Media.

Above the water and in the water
and in the light of puddles
the petroleum rainbow spreads.
Tinting pigeon feathers and the scales of fish.

Continue I thought
and vowed to think less,
to mean
as little as possible, paint only images
of lives I've never known, or vaguely,
or vaguely remember,
maybe only shadows.

In shadows that come
from the edges
of the painting where we began,
the relics of speech become invisible--
a cadaver's pulse reaches
deep into the earth
to find its rhythm in mud
and ashes. Feathered corpses

and later the stain of blackberries.
For me this is your scent pushed
back into light, I press my lips together
and hum a place for the broken.

Outside in a another state,
in a movie about another state,
under a clear blue sky that the director
must have waited weeks for,
I sense a story unfolding.

Off screen, the key grip
splashes along a river
throwing handfuls of stones
toward birdnests, stuffing his pockets
with movement and blackberries.

Sometimes dance ruins everything,
the movement and sway of your hips
faraway on someone else's dashboard,
half-words mixed into my ear
from an AM station and rustlings
frozen at the river. Hold tight
and listen to your fallen echo.

Even the whirling sky
has found music to crouch by--
trash fire in the headlights, feathers
where stars might be, brambles
beside the river, bloody
with blackberries. And then
the sky, dead with fishes.

Sidewalk Poem

The man sleeps with the pigeons
in a butcher's doorway.
He has introduced himself to me
every day for nearly a month. Today
his name is Cafeteria Boardroom.
Today he wears marching shoes, catches cherry blossoms
in a pith helmet. I pass him.
He claps twice and calls for us
to dance. The street keeps walking and he begins
to sing. He stoops
in front of an approaching trolley
transferring a piece of silver
from his palm to the rail.
House captain! he shouts, *House captain!*
and quietly, *god bless.*
When I was a child I stole
two crayons from a box--
vermillion and ultramarine;
his voice is the pictures
I wanted to draw.

The Myth of Remaining Motionless

In Eldersberg you can still appear
as though you were moving. He's fenced in
and has finally been given a barn, the man
who wakes the neighbors with his mooing.

My dalmatian sniffs between the man's
legs and licks at his neck
where the Holstein's head is sown on.
It matters, at least for today, whether or not

one has a hand to hold. There is a difference
between those who never stop the car to throw
pizza crust to mule-deer and the painting on
a wall of a Scottish castle. A woman sits

in the center of a sunlit field. Her white dress
is spread out like a white dress. The buttermilk
falling from the tilted pitcher is frozen.
The buttermilk and the buttercups have imprisoned

numerous insects, bumblebees. The wind
is blowing at a perfectly even rate, therefore,
it is no surprise that the slight bend in the grasses
hasn't changed in centuries. The woman

hasn't moved in centuries. Why disturb her?
The man thinks of the cow's carcass
sunken in a leech pond--exsanguine, bloated.
His eyes are caked with gnats and bottle flies.

And my dog goes to him again, licking the stumps
at the ends of his arms. It is too warm, no breeze,
not enough rain for the garden, so I can't help
thinking about her, alone in the field. If the wind

stopped, or she ever decided to smile
it would have to be the world speaking
itself through her voice--
aibostnaikno, strukteinshnitt, chezlaneau.

Letter to My Sister

I said "Hazel where you going?"
and he said, "Inside."
which I took to mean the rain.

Last night the cistern overflowed and the road
washed out. All of our topsoil
in the street, we cannot find the camellias.

Life "inside," he said, and I meant
tomorrow when I heard him.
Forty-four pages later and I still can't sleep.

Three skinned away from a face
causes problems. Suggestion:
make it part of your palm.

We abide
by certain rules.
"Thou shalt not take the Lord's name in vain."

Water the plants three times
a week and do not touch anything green.
Skin itself is poison.

He said, "I don't understand,"
so I tried different words,
tried ones I'd heard him

use--tulip and dime, Roosevelt.
I wonder now what home looks
like. How are you sister?

I have folded the corner of a page to show you
a word, one word and I cannot find it.
I am reminded to take nothing in vane.

I am reminded of hiding in the mud,
of the man in camouflage paint, shirtless
and feeling hurtful.

Varnish

Beneath the thick coat of varnish a lost lover
has built a small fire, maybe the forest

thinks of it as loneliness--a white cross on church spire,
an interruption, thin, on a section of canvas

where men hired to protect heads of state
from terrorism gather like dots

under the burnt alder. The branches full
of song, the making of movement, of wind

moving its invisible jaws along our faces.
The wind that loves the taste of children

and horses and ocean, the wind that pretends
to go away at sunset--a wolf that visits at dusk,

and watches my television from atop the woodpile.
The evening news offers ariel footage of a shootout in L.A.

and she has taught herself to read lips.
She has taught herself

to be a wolf, leaving carcasses in the yard
with undetectable smell. Every night,

the asphodel I buy each day at the market,
transforms itself from bell into bell

as if a piece of the sky had fallen
into the bird bath and I, walking from the kitchen

where no one has talked in centuries, suddenly older, come to you
and promise to kill your dog myself if need be,

to have men, over-dressed for the season, serve us soft-shell crabs
and mint tea, if only you would lift the brown film from our faces.

Rules of Conduct

Yes, and a full set of mirrors
when our faces combined, grew sharp
like a bottle broken in a cheek bone.
Fangs, nothing elusive.

We are goats.
Well, technically there's a swatch of red carpet
beneath our horns and one bell that comes close to ringing.
Thirty seven times now and seven I've had to tighten the bow
for fear my face would fall off.

The metal olive trees extend themselves beyond
the sunlight. I am waiting for
a translation of the leaves.

Suppose that certain parties would prefer to have
aspects of their conduct remain private.

Unchain the play, the seal, the small dirt.

Note, general idea: avoid such temptation
and determine an appropriate order.

Update, lesson, Tuesday,
when the jasper antelope cross
the cornfield and call us
chiseled and *virgin*. Hello.
It is a type vengeance
like lovers in the snow, a box of detergent
hitched to chronology
removing the desert from beneath the ocean.

You're right, it would be funny
if the stage suddenly emptied
and beat the audience stupid.

The razor-blade tastes of summer--
a shovel to harvest canaries.
Again, tell me more about her.
I must know. Something
sad. I'd like to be

Inside the Monastery

Inside the monastery
the lights have dimmed
the jack-o-lanterns have been hung,
and a phonograph has been set spinning

Drunk on bath water,
the next few words could be anything.
Anything. Velvet gloves, a coat of nails
an entire calendar, the gift of poison--
methods borrowed from the living saints.

There is an alternative. The nightmare
alters and continues. *Grey* has been painted
on the wall in every imaginable color.

Genuine loss arrives without emotion,
without speech--tumble weeds. Questions
plus questions equals to have, an exhibit

of body parts--corpses dressed in skeleton
suits. The marigolds on the mantle explain everything.
A handful of teeth and horrible meat,
although the pause of night is memory.

This room is an alabaster suitcase.
The distant look of a look
closes into the smallest word
feeling plain and foreign
and suddenly antique.

Antique veins fill with work songs
and hymns--explanations, justifications
of guiltlessness. A lesson in prayer.
A wonderful animal grows
in the cradle. It whispers our names.

In the Visionary Arts Museum
Baltimore, Maryland

A macrame imitation of Van Gogh's *Sunflowers*
hangs in the lobby,
the sign says: *Do Not Touch*,
and a father holds his boy up to stroke the hairs
of yellow and green yarn.
Most of us laugh at the noose
hanging from the doorframe in the corner.
It is pasted over with fusilli
which are individually painted--red and white and blue.
The young couple in front of us debates
asking for their money back--
nothing they have seen resembles art.

Once, I made a pair of shoes
from armadillos. I cut holes in their backs and gutted them
to make room for the feet,
lacquered the hides from a can I found
behind the bowling alley, carved wooden soles,
and left the tails to drag behind.

I think they would fit well here--
at the bottom of the *Muffler Man*'s legs maybe,
or maybe over there on a pedestal next to the tooth-pick crown
with jelly-bean gem-stones.
And for the boy in the stairwell who has found another boy
to kiss, I'll give the shoes yellow feet and purple ears.
The first pair will be dedicated to Isabella who is reaching for my hand
in the middle of an empty room
that an anonymous artist has titled:
Today No One is in Love.

The Ferry-Boat Pilot

He stares at a wall mural for a long time--
a wide unmoving ocean
anticipating the scatter of gulls.
From an airplane the breadknife barely makes a splash.
Between him and the wall an empty sidewalk.
He walks to the edge of the water pauses looks
and turns. Looks at the sidewalk and the pilot
in the airplane. Passersby are certain to walk behind him.
Fumes from the cannery cross the inlet.

He unwraps lunch from a bit of newsprint
tells me he's forgotten to plant the birdseed
for his peacock. It's tied to a dead hawthorne
in the backyard. Laminated magazine clippings
of emus and flamingos and flowering herbs
hang from the lower branches.

The woman who sits on the park bench
has disappeared since yesterday, she wears an overcoat
and a feather in her hat. She clutches a large blue bag
in her lap, always. She memorizes the bus schedule.

The wind changes direction, the sky darkens,
and I fold my hat into a flier
nailing it to a sign prohibiting motorized vehicles.
The pilot walks without me through the voices
of children into the arboretum.
He reads each word as we pass: *gingko*,
arborvitae. He can not speak
to them or anything.
Rosie--the legless rhetorician--lies
against the Japanese maple.
I empty my coat pockets and give her the contents.

He goes to her and leans his head into her
ribcage. She opens the dictionary
and begins, deliberately. *Furniture: verb. giving off light,*
eating holes in our reflections. Mercenary: noun.
a period of peace or tranquility.
Ventriloquist: small child imitating rain.

The Red Velvet Armchair

Saturday: The last wasp of autumn flies into
the room, almost dead
with cold. And slow, easy to trap
beneath a jar and set in the sun.
The last wasp flew into my room--
only an insect, one of many
I've hated all summer and chased
with aerosols or rolled up magazines.
Just a wasp. Even the word
is sinister, but still it is the last one
and it is forgetting how to breathe.
The groceries are still outside
and we make love on an ordinary chair.
I can never remember the color, I can never remember
my dreams, ever. I know that they're long.
The ones I do remember, I regret enjoying.
It stopped moving you notice, the wasp, you suggest
finally that it is probably dead.

Sunday:

Monday: October is the best month
to sleep forever and come long dreams
driving like the retired, sit at the MVA
on lunch hour and watch the deaf,
the forgetful and nearly blind renew
there licenses, to tell everyone *No*,
I don't remember having eaten the broccoli.

Tuesday: There is no wind at last, everything
outside is still, a woman comes
each Tuesday to take away the leaves.
I look forward to her. I'd like to invite her
in to take off her shoes. I truly believe
that I am seeing everything,
all the golf balls growing into the lake,
the yellow reeds and the old reeds
and the briar at wood's edge, honeysuckle
in the clearing, skullcap and chickweed,
a wet snap far away, a sudden movement.

Wednesday: There is a room where someone leans
an ear against the door
in the middle of the night,
a hairy man, he's suspicious of noise, he wants
to trap it. He arranges the insects he catches
according to size and color
if that too works, under glass, under artificial light.

Friday: Tomorrow will be shorter than today, less time
for quiet. Tomorrow is still the best day to begin
an experiment, almost like a story, like guilt,
a collection in an album; sorted, dried, flattened,
harmonized, a little road between us.

Ritual Scarification

I believe we may have met once
just outside the skin, in all

honesty, outside the skull, pulling
away each other's grin. Choosing

new identification resembles work.
The man in his fishtank thinks

sometimes, licks the pennies and marbles on his floor.
The illogical is swift, the movement from one chord

to the next, the background. His eyes calliope
in and out of caves. What do you think,

officially? Orchids alternate between hands
with many different sizes like the little sink-

faced girl eating Campbell's soup, tomatoes
crushed beneath the ash bin. All morning long

people who have never met lift toenail clippings
to their noses and grope in a darkness

of the cottonwoods, grope for laughter. Threading
each other's feet onto fish-hooks, they throw

seductions into slow upstream holes, making
meals from orgasm and other limitations of language.

The Problem with Memory

Snakeskins and broken eggs
in a hole beneath the woodpile,

a jelly jar half full of rotten leaves
and mud. A figure in the garden
unwound from a spool
lifeless and hanging. Sewn
on grin and eyes painted open.

This is memory. I had it coming.
The weeds that strangle out
the tomatoes tangle
up the straw filled legs. Think
of these things and smell gasoline.
Stop the truck beside a creek bank and
crawl beneath the engine. The air is cool
and gunpowder and dust.
I cannot explain my anger.

Fuel drips steadily into
a small dry dirt, but I look inside.
The ripped seats, the cracked
dashboard. A six inch plastic Jesus fallen
beneath the seat. Something else is wrong, the frame
is slightly bent. I think outside
this--water bills, and car repairs, call Mom.

Jesus has been mysteriously working
its way into my poems. I see him.
A man superimposed on a police target,
the black silhouette of a scarecrow
with a stitched smile. Blue eyes. Clearly now,
a small hole in his side, one in his shoulder,
one in his neck. I am not
yet a good shot.

The difference between his blood and mine
is small. Alizarin crimson, turpentine, and
linseed oil--I cannot stop it dripping.
I dip my fingers and lick. Remember
the transubstantiation? No
not the taste, but the brown
trout hiding in the dust.

You know what they look like.
You've seen them before pointing
upstream or in pictures. But in the dust
it has disguised itself as dead,
pretending it had never been introduced.
Its scales sift away in the wind into

the sunset and noctilucent clouds
gunpowder and the ocean memory.
The scent of pheasant pie. We placed
a can of corn on the neighbor's fence--a target
the size of a hand. The yellow explosion.

When I say memory I mean tomorrow
and next year and you. The woodpile,
the snake and her daughters
the husks of scales, the fish and scales
connected diamonds of skin. The wet painting
in my basement of a strawman. He removes
his lover's lips, dyes them blue and dips
them in Lucite. She sews them to the hole in his ear.
Have I forgotten his true name or left it out?

Maybe This Town

If I told you that I sent this letter
from Valparaiso and the post-mark
was clearly stamped in German
who would you trust? The resurrection
is so easy these days, you have your mother
and her mother, they have passed down there secrets:
the shirt dance, the sidewalk prayer.
I have lived for centuries and have never
but yes met dozens of women
without a past. I wish you were no different
group of men with only one face.

At the zoo last Tuesday the monkeys spit
on their windows and threw shit
at us between the bars. They will hold
your hand though, for nickels and dimes
or gum wrappers. A few things
must have invented themselves: the guitar
string, surely no one, and what I can remember
of the wrinkles in your elbow,
of course sentimental, but I have so many excuses.
One: I have given away my telescope.

I meet a girl at the grocery squeezing the roasts.
Red hair. At the checkout, we make up names for
artists we could talk about at cocktail parties
or tractor-pulls. When I bring her up in conversation . . .
now what is their relationship. Are they lovers?
I don't know what to say

in this town the illusion that the sun emerges
from the water means east, no,
try a line more like . . . in this town
the water gives birth, rather bears itself,
in this town, in this this town this, well
you understand , last night she was wonderful.

It's unfortunate that most of life
is uninteresting, the dog drinking from the toilet
again. Eight hundred and fifty-thousand
cross one intersection each day, don't tell
us this, use an image to illustrate, think of
"In a Station of the Metro," one face,
antifreeze slowly eating a piece of skin, your skin.

Machine of Words

The man I carry on my back holds his heart from flaming.
I think I am falling in love with him,
I think and begin my head dripping, begin
leaning against the past into a new space.
A direction.

The woman, the stranger I wake next to,
reaches into my mouth. "To speak" she says,
"is to be forever, to be whirled out of moment."

We sprout erasures, are a machine of words.
Opening me at the base of my skull, the man
invites himself in and measures the first
great heave of us. We neither feel nor understand.

I collect daggers, I collect scissors and pieces of stone,
I collect newspapers and names I once knew, a set of hands
around my windpipe. The boney howl I knew as brother.

I collect these and other things--
under the ocean, star fish
name themselves based on what they
have seen: the great fires we mistake for old women
and devils, small sounds we make with movement,
the caverns in which life began.