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### Bellevue

Sean Edgely  
*CUNY City College*

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*bellevue*

Sean Edgley

David Groff

12/10/2012

“Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of Master of Fine Arts of the City College of  
the City University of New York”

# Contents

<b><i>Giant Blue Eyeball Washes Ashore in Florida</i></b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Bachelor</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Lazy Hemingway</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Greetings from Lovely</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Long Island City</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Bellevue</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Autosuggestive</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>The Glorious Ninth</b>	<b>17</b>
<b><i>For All Mankind</i></b>	<b>19</b>
<b>The Supremes Backstage at the Apollo, 1965</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Mussels &amp; Fries</b>	<b>23</b>
<b><i>Drukqs</i> Triptych</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Hallucinations, Age 7</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>What We Have Learned from Duels</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>In Kubrick's <i>Paths of Glory</i></b>	<b>34</b>
<b><i>"Whether or not they exist, we're slaves to the gods"</i></b>	<b>36</b>
<b>Réka's Dream</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Aegina</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Kharms</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Budapest is for Haters</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Rayleigh Scattering</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Frankie's Hill (Ferihegy)</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>The Merchant of Venice</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>For Bernard Loiseau, Who Killed Himself</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Out of Fear that He Would Lose a Michelin Star</b>	
<b>The Last Laugh</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>Salvage</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>The Three Types of Nothing</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Marriage Proposal from the Dinosaur Exhibits at the Museum of Natural History</b>	<b>58</b>

## ***Giant Blue Eyeball Washes Ashore in Florida***

--breaking news story

*"To live is not necessary; only to sail"*

--Gnaeus Pompeius, who, during a severe storm, ordered sailors to transport food from Africa to Rome

As my brothers and I  
gathered around the immense insect  
that had alighted on the sandbox,  
we began to name  
all the African countries we knew,  
as if when we had hit upon  
the creature's homeland  
he would give us a sign.  
Before we'd gotten south  
of the communes of Kinshasa,  
he flew off over the fence  
and into the fictive glory of myth  
that seemed more mythic  
before the internet.

Gino Covacci was out for his usual  
perambule along Pompano Beach  
when the eyeball stared back up at him  
from under his metal detector.  
He first kicked at it  
with his socked Crocs  
before picking it up.  
Understandably, we are most willing  
to cradle in our arms  
what we know cannot hurt us.

We wanted to know  
where the eye had come from.  
Had it been dislodged  
from the socket of a giant squid?  
Was it the severed oculus  
of a six hundred pound swordfish,  
the victim of a cruise ship's motor?

Or perhaps, a token  
from the fabled progeny  
of the Nordic kraken discovered  
by Hans Egede, Bishop of Greenland.

Melville's inspiration for Ahab's foil  
was Mocha Dick, a sperm whale  
that survived over a hundred attacks  
from whalers off the coast of Chile.  
With each new laceration,  
the barnacles gravitated to him,  
forming a bulwark from the harpoons--  
but not the anthropomorphic jabs--  
of warmongering men.

In middle school, we were all given  
a sheep's eyeball to dissect.  
When my scalpel became stuck  
in the frozen purple orb,  
Mr. Winters kneeled down  
as if to extract Excalibur from its stone.  
During recess, the sky opened  
and miracles befell the tetherball spheres.

The Florida Fish and Wildlife worker  
who poses for photos with the eyeball  
cribs it in her latex hands,  
the cerulean gleam of the aqueous humour  
humbling the shamrock tattoo  
on her inner wrist.  
A man named Santiago,  
having trekked all the way  
from Kissimmee stands beside her,  
wielding a fishing rod  
on his bare olive shoulder.

Some things will never come close  
enough to land for us to touch.  
The Great Pacific Garbage Patch  
that forms a vortex

twice the size of Texas.  
The Northern Fur Seal that sleeps  
with its eyes open and will abandon  
even its own children  
at the first sight of sand.  
The satellites which monitor  
the most minute of our pantomimes,  
and wink down at us from their apogees.

When my brother was bitten  
in the eye by a dalmatian,  
the right side of his face swelled shut  
and he slept on frozen peas for weeks.  
People side-stepped him  
at the supermarket as if his face  
had gone from bruised to an object  
in Tolkien's inky legendarium.

People pack into cars  
and drive hundreds of miles  
when a massive egg washes up  
on the shores of Japan or  
when the Montauk Monster  
emerges on a beach in the Hamptons.  
When a steel structure from  
the *Waterworld* set surfaces  
off the coast of Brazil,  
the local Wapishana tie  
cassava to the camera welds  
and watch from their roofs  
as their offering drifts out of view.

When the mysterious eye  
is sent to a lab to be tested  
it is quickly forgotten.  
In a newscast weeks later,  
a Laysan Albatross has died  
on the wayward wing of an airplane  
after having ingested flotsam,  
leaving behind two large leg bones.

Long after his stomach dissolves,  
a pile of plastic remains  
as a memorial to his spine.

## Bachelor

At twenty-one I was pulled  
over by an entourage of SUVs  
in the middle of a first date,  
headlights swarming  
the asphalt prairie.

Spotted hyenas also  
make their rounds in packs. Because  
they devour all parts of their catch,  
no proof of their acts ever remains.

Shining his flashlight into  
my date's eyes, he explained I  
was changing lanes too often without  
signaling.

If you think  
it uncaring  
that I hardly remember  
her facial features  
try  
to describe one person you passed  
on the street today.

We've all had that daydream where  
we pull the gun  
from their holster  
spin it  
on our finger and  
hand it back while saying  
*the British  
aren't coming.*

The local Irvine police would often  
receive complaints  
in the middle of the night from residents  
in the newer housing communities,  
where the cries of displaced coyotes



were mistaken for newborn  
babies.

From the window of my Dodge Neon  
she watched him administer  
the field  
sobriety test,  
slender feminine hand pressed  
to her cheek,  
the two stones of  
her purity ring gleaming  
like a father's far-off  
watchful eyes.

Completing my ninth  
heel-to-toe step,  
I looked up at the towers  
of the business complex,  
the statue in front of the Ayn Rand Institute  
glowering down on us.

He let me go with a warning,  
the three black suburbans racing  
away from us into the night,

the gas sloshing in their huge tanks  
like a memory  
of going to bed  
on an empty stomach.

## Lazy Hemingway

The post I'd put up online  
requested someone who was  
a "grizzled suburban vet"  
and "over the scene."  
I should've known when I clicked  
on his name in the subject heading  
what a terrible roommate  
Bukowski would make.  
Sure, we leer together  
at the new exhibits  
in the hip galleries of Echo Park,  
pass back and forth a brown bag  
as we watch the Roller Derby Dolls  
barrel into each other.  
But he wears cigarillo smoke  
like a cape around the apartment,  
the dishes in the sink leaning  
like some stained Pisa.  
We cruise over to Santa Anita  
to blow his book advances on horses,  
take the Amtrak just to look  
out the windows and decry  
how ugly the world is getting.  
He shows up for the release  
of my new book of poems  
*The Teenage Pregnancies of Mexico City*  
drunk with some cadillac waitress  
and after he passes out,  
I glance into his journal  
to steal names for future books.  
Outside a reading up in Frisco  
he gets into fisticuffs  
and I drive up the next day.  
*I'm gonna make that pretty Kerouac*  
*into a pugilist yet*  
he repeats the entire ride.  
That word's dropped out  
of the vernacular, I tell him

as we climb the Grapevine.  
Out of respect for the dead,  
I never tell him  
that the aftermath of his women  
reek like the leather inserts  
of sweaty ghosts in heels.  
You can't call them *whores* anymore  
I remind him.  
And anyway, have you looked  
at yourself in the mirror lately?

## Greetings from Lovely

My sister lives at the highest point in the city.  
The Transamerica Pyramid peaks above buildings  
like a Voyager bath toy. It needs more bubbles.  
Give the window washers the day off  
and dangle them from the sky like baby mobiles.  
In the dream I was giving myself a spray-on tan.  
I ask Father Houlehan what this all means.  
He recommends fruit snacks, but only from the kids on the subway.  
Instead I ride outside streetcars all the way to the Castro.  
I arrive not at Mrs. Field's but Hot Cookie.  
There are no girls behind the counter in felt hats.  
I grow anxious under a menu of Comic Sans.  
My synesthesia nosedives through paper plates.  
Houses are painted like vowels: mauve, lime, gamboge  
and streets sound like Hawaiian islands.

My gaydar is broken. I leave it with Joe in the shop.  
The gringos in the Mission look like cannibalistic burritos.  
A stranger scoops me ice cream called Secret Breakfast.  
Bourbon vanilla flowers my eyes, my tongue lines oak barrels.  
I want to smoke homegrown with a girl named Fiona.  
The wooden fire escape is perfect for this.  
After I want to return to a home where all of my mothers love her.  
Embarcadero means pier in English.  
Can you sense the manatees spooning under Market?  
Their bodies leave marks like puff paints.  
It's requiescat in pace not rest in peace.  
That's hella mean to call them sea cows.  
Fiona keeps asking me what's wrong.  
I cannot speak from the pass-arounds.  
The whisky ice lunges at me like a banker from Nebraska.  
The taxi that got me here is idling on Saturn's rings.

## Long Island City

We look up  
at the peopled windows  
of the highrises,  
miming to them  
as if it's the 6th inning  
of a Mets game  
and they have the t-shirt cannons.  
We will take what we can get.  
They are mamma bird.  
But if they come down from their towers,  
we cannot promise anything.  
Rome, San Francisco  
were founded on seven hills,  
but this city was built  
on the valleys between us.  
We round up all the lap dogs  
in a circle and say  
*this time it's serious.*  
*This time it's for Chekhov.*  
Laid out on the grass  
we undress and dress ourselves  
ad infinitum  
never achieving nudity  
or Latin.  
When a butterfly lands  
on your dress,  
we pray for a long tongue  
so that self-fertilization  
can be avoided.  
After we fall asleep  
the fishermen approach,  
pinching us  
to see if they exist.

## Bellevue

I wonder what will become of Vanna White  
and Summer Bartholomew.  
Will the sex of their children  
smell like cake batter forever?  
The girl on TV  
had lipsticked the straw.  
If you're interested,  
teases the nurse,  
they're called rainbow parties.

My first night in the ER is between  
an open-throat emphysemic  
and the survivor of three bypasses.  
Nurses go by with garden shears  
and couscous.  
Convicts blow kisses  
between rosaries of handcuffs.

As I come to, gasping for air,  
the surgeons are concluding their debate  
of Whole Foods versus Trader Joe's,  
an assistant yanks out the breathing tube,  
and my appendix looks up at me  
like some deflated anemone.

Once I get out,  
I recultivate my weakness  
for headbands and baked goods.  
I order pad thai just to look at the shrimp.  
I walk down the hills of Harlem,  
looking for virgins with Guadalupe.  
My Nation of Islam name  
is mistaken for Glaswegian slang.

I gather round children to tell them  
the story of the mad scientist Yakub.  
I have nowhere to go.  
I have no health insurance.

On my way home I pass  
Hasidic women atop the subway stairs,  
mournful as midnight hens.  
Enclosed in a moat of hybrid Escalades  
are the Marcy Projects.  
I dream about contacting an African prince  
to help with the bill.  
My boss wants a sick note.  
The ambulance dead interrupt my phone calls,  
tearing down Flushing Ave. for Woodhull,  
where the hair of the women on TV  
shines like bushels of wheat  
at the gates of Heaven.

## Autosuggestive

In the middle of a sleepless night  
my father turns to that nocturnal flower,  
self-hypnosis.  
Asleep next to him  
in white gloves,  
my mother  
like some misplaced curator.  
There is grayscale  
and sheet-swish.  
Also his voice.  
Undertones lobbed like moths  
into the hand recorder.  
Unemployment at fifty three  
haunts him like a B-side  
from Elvis,  
what could have been.  
He seeks out rest  
in the highball trefoils  
of his Midwestern childhood.  
He is distracted by the books  
on attic shelves,  
their Old English remedies in verse.  
Reciting facts calms him.  
When Marco Polo entered his horse  
into the dressage competition,  
the audience went mongrel.  
When Satie asked to be buried  
in his instrument,  
he knew he'd be making the perfect  
prepared piano of our breathing.  
When my father lost his job  
he drove to the ocean  
and sent me pictures of redwoods.  
Lightning fringed the coast.  
The dog ran ahead.  
His *heel heel*  
lobbed back like an inside joke  
between him



and the bandages of thunder.

## The Glorious Ninth

John Cage was right  
about the space between sounds.

Before Eno was even born  
he was wading his flotilla  
of electroacoustic compositions  
into the swells of Puget Sound.

Look at him in '39  
writing computer code up there  
in the lighthouse.

When you are unsure  
of what to say  
first chant your thoughts  
into a whisper.  
In your head I mean.

Bob Ross senses this as well.  
As he stands  
on the rings  
of my REM sleep  
he hardly even speaks.  
When he does  
it is as a trail's end.

For Heidegger, silence  
was the genuine mode of speech  
deathless as the universe.

Camus knew that a man  
is what he is  
not from what he says,  
but what he  
keeps to himself.

Kierkegaard, as we all know  
hated the tongue.

If *love loves to love*  
is it any surprise I'm so silent?

With all his inventiveness  
Joyce could never divorce himself  
from English grammar.

Basho's haiku were clouds  
in a weather system  
without syntax.

The most intense form  
of listening is anticipation  
but try telling that to  
Ludwig van.

## ***For All Mankind***

*We will travel to Mars  
even as folks on Earth  
are still ripping open potato chip  
bags with their teeth  
--David Berman*

Obama, you blue-eyed devil,  
you canceler of moon programs.  
How will the wives of the Gulf Coast  
pine for the cosmic distancelessness?  
Did you consider how we,  
the calligraphically challenged,  
will be learning the characters  
for *sky* and *noodle*  
as the Chinese maneuver their satellites  
with the skill of an Arirang choreographer?

Consider the total silence  
of 25,000 miles per hour.  
When the hatch to Apollo 11 opens,  
the claymation astronaut dangles  
by an umbilical cord *ex nihilo*  
over the blue womb of the earth.  
And all he can say is *Hallelujah, Houston.*

In the control room of buzz cuts  
someone is shouting  
*Existence precedes essence!*  
in a Kennedy accent  
while on the monitors  
baggies of thermo-cheddar  
levitate through the rooms.

Scott and Irwin got to drive  
the lunar dune buggy first.  
You can see Armstrong

in the background of the footage  
already slouching toward reclusiveness,  
kicking at the tumbleweed rocks  
as he hums Merle Haggard's  
*I'm a Lonesome Fugitive.*

These unmanned men  
how they would love to high five Galileo,  
but content themselves  
with visions of the far-off bonfires  
of Saharan Bedouin tribes,  
the eerie weightlessness  
of their lyres in open tuning.

While shaving in a window  
overlooking the earth  
it is natural to go back and forth  
between college football scores  
and the desire to be God  
versus the need to be God.

The Bedouins believe  
that in the afterlife  
we are given back our umbilical cords  
to suckle the divine like milk.  
Until then, repeat  
after Eugene Cernan  
every night before bed:

*The stars are my home*  
*The stars are my home*  
*The stars are my home*

## The Supremes Backstage at the Apollo, 1965

Diana lies sideways  
on a metal bunk bed

facing the camera.  
The ladder is in shadows

and thus she appears to float  
by virtue of her own diaphanous,

composed gaze.  
A Candy Darling gaze.

A lifebed deathgaze.  
This is her face before

and after, and some nights,  
during the concert.

Her heels are lined up  
on the ledge above her,

the length of a white dress.  
A newspaper at her curled legs

bears her image.  
Florence is face down

on the bunk below.  
She is twenty-one,

but has just ten years left.  
She doesn't know this.

Even Diana doesn't know this.  
An effaced penumbra

to the right, Mary's arm  
is an accidental gray wing.

The camera's flash bulb  
pops at Diana's kneecap,

but she is very calm.  
She isn't looking

into the lens or  
at the photographer.

Her eyes are far off  
in the hand-clap continuum

from which no soul diva  
has ever escaped.

## Mussels & Fries

*"But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto Godliness." --The Apostle Paul to his young protégé, Timothy*

The last time I made mussels  
I cut off the tip of my middle finger.  
We never found it  
among the cutting board's lamina of shallot.

One of the crowning achievements  
of French Middle Ages cuisine was roast peacock  
sewn back into its skin, feathers intact,  
the feet and beak rose-gilded.

On tour in Africa the rapper  
demanded a watermelon carved  
into the shape of his wife's breasts.

Up close the erect nipple is rarely beautiful.

As a child I stepped on a nail in the yard.  
My mother soaked the wound in a bath of bay leaves  
until I passed out.

A relative had been a member of The Bloody Tubs,  
a group of nativist thugs known for their method  
of dumping their political enemies  
into slaughterhouse tubs.

Have you made love with one hand?  
In the bedroom her hair smelled  
as dark and sweet as pennyroyal.

In his next studio session  
Otis Redding had intended to write a final verse  
for *Sittin' on the Dock of the Bay*  
but his plane crashed days after the initial recording.



Some people go there whole lives  
without ever learning to whistle.

## **Drukqs Triptych**

*"I'm quite a people person, actually. I hang out with strange people a lot. I like mentally ill people. I've always found schizophrenia fuckin' excellent. I think it's the next evolutionary stage of humanity"*                      *--Richard D. James of Aphex Twin*

## **Jynweythek Ylow**

The dream of  
Miss California  
is on auto-loop.  
The harpsichord  
in the background  
is being played  
all too well.  
The royal family  
transferred to the Tuileries.  
Powdery men  
preparing for the Pavane.  
The stiff lace  
in the drawing rooms  
of Combray.  
*May I have this...*  
a voice  
trailing off shyly.  
In an hour  
she will wake up.  
This will never  
have happened.

## **Btoum Roumada**

Dear song,  
play me like a church  
where Gaudí  
is the window washer.  
In the film version  
of this emotion,

four nuns skydive  
while holding hands  
their habits as blue  
as the heavens.  
Looking up  
from the floor of the nave  
you hear glass bells,  
see the columns  
rise and branch  
into the canopy.  
A cathedral forever  
at dawn.  
La Sagrada Familia  
crusting from the earth  
like mounds of old honey.  
An organ pedal rising  
to its former position  
and the foot  
that left us all here.

### **QKThr**

This is the day  
you learned to walk.  
The grand piano  
played by a computer.  
That way the musician  
can circle his instrument,  
placing found objects  
on the strings.  
Tiny microphones  
in the piano's body  
record this secret machinery.  
The sound of a thousand  
small hammers striking chords,  
the weightless drone of hands,  
the notes unclear,  
the pitch unidentifiable.  
Like when you

had learned to walk  
but still could not speak.

## Hallucinations, Age 7

In the tub  
there are Lusitanic icebergs  
and torpedo freeze pops  
On the walls  
there are Cheeto cornflowers  
and potato chip crucifixes  
I am in the tub  
I have a fever of 103  
I am convulsing  
from Celsius conversions  
I am so hot and cold  
I am concave  
My mother  
is reading my last rites  
from the sink  
with palm branches  
like wings  
She is fifteen years old  
with an overbite  
and flowergirl tiara  
My father  
is a negative Superman  
He comes in and out  
He is the Devil's baritone  
I want him out  
If he is Mephisto  
I am boy-Faust  
If my mother  
is Lois Lane  
I am positive Clark Kent  
When he leaves again  
I will grab my towel  
and lead her out  
I will fight off  
his hirelings  
this Holofernes  
Her name is Judith  
I will translate her story

into Latin  
I will find some way  
to take off  
her handcuffs

## What We Have Learned from Duels

### Thomas Benton & Charles Lucas on Bloody Island, Missouri

The duel happened twice.

Benton already had a history,  
getting into a street brawl in Nashville  
with General Andrew Jackson.

The courtroom medieval in its severity,  
the two lawyers huffing and frilly,  
epaulets dangly like corners of a pool table.

Real men stab each other in the front.

When Lucas encountered Benton at a polling barn  
he questioned his right to vote  
for failing to pay taxes on three slaves.  
Benton's rebuff? To call him a *puppy*.

The next evening, Lucas was rowed  
off the island, the musket ball in his chest  
rising to kiss the carmine crater of entry  
with each slowing breath.

On the powers of underintimidation,  
sprinkle a little more powder under your wig.

### David & Goliath, the Valley of Elah

Understand this:

David declined all offers of armor.  
He waded into the brook  
before selecting five stones,  
the rubber of his sling  
hanging from his waist like tendon.

In his dream the night before,  
no matter how high he held  
the decapitated head above the crowd,  
it never ceased to cling to him  
like an extension of his own body.

The hosts of the sky circling  
a backdrop of black onyx,  
weightless as a hangman's conscience.

From his days playing the harp  
for King Saul,  
David knew of his true calling  
as an artist:

The projective canvas of Goliath's forehead,  
a ceiling in a chapel yet to be built.  
The chance of taking down a philistine  
as bittersweet as the grapes of Bethlehem.

### **Yosemite Sam & Bugs Bunny, Pirate Ship**

I do pursue  
By struck match or by dagger  
These white flags worn through  
Thy unchecked swagger.

From upon the lookout perch  
Does our wake tarry,  
Our records besmirched,  
Scarlet heavens un-marry.

Pestilent hare,  
Face bravely my cannon  
And resign thy care  
To this seafaring Montanan.



## **Alexander Pushkin & Georges d'Anthès, St. Petersburg**

Natalya wouldn't remarry, would she?  
But the way she disappeared  
into the drawing room with Czar Nicholas...  
The wax still warm on the envelope.

Tell me  
I didn't mean to shoot Lensky.  
The way the scope opened and then narrowed  
like an artery before a stroke.

They laugh about my Ethiopian blood  
and offer me the lowest court title.

I'll silence them all with my pen,  
quaff ink for months.

Natalya,  
I can buy the prettiest dresses.  
My hand a constant loom of pretty dresses.

If I survive this gunshot,  
Oh Doctor,  
I will wear my reflection  
on the gray marble of the river  
like a medallion of the absurd.

## **Miyamoto Musashi & Sasaki Kojiro, Ganryu Island**

Imagine your arrival  
at the gateless gate.

If you encounter Buddha  
on your path, kill him too.

Clap: you know the sound  
of two hands. But one?

Absence allows for the presence  
of the other.

Musashi fasted on a steady diet of koans  
leading up to the showdown.

In one hand a curved sword  
and in the other, jittery hunger.

Show up an hour late.  
Melt your opponent like the glaciers of Fuji.

Wield your sword upon your shoulder  
like an oar of the sea gods.

Wait for the angle of sun-blindness  
and move swiftly.

As you are paddling away  
stop and look around you.

## In Kubrick's *Paths of Glory*

the French soldiers  
leading the hopeless charge  
against the Germans  
don't speak French.  
Or a pickle of German.  
The generals pace about  
the Napoleonic palaces  
of Culver City,  
articulating that high  
Ohio River vernacular,  
drowning our suspension  
of disbelief every time  
a character speaks.  
Kirk Douglas resembles his son  
all too well,  
dodging the carrion  
of Wall Street trenches.  
For each of the 68 takes  
of the *last meal* scene,  
the director demanded  
a new roast duck.  
You, Mr. Cobb!  
You, Herr Kubrick!  
are to be courtmartialed.  
Like the families  
of the innocents executed  
you shall be given  
a franc each.  
Yes, we are moved  
in the final scene  
when a captured German girl  
sings to us in a tongue  
we do not understand  
and we hum ourselves into oblivion.  
Instead of leaving it  
a Broadway bomb,  
a lesson in Roman decimation,  
you brought it

to the shores of Hollywood.  
Plutarch in a no-man's-land  
of palms.

***“Whether or not they exist, we’re slaves to the gods”***

*“These are Fortunate Islands/  
These are lands without a place”*

--Fernando Pessoa

The first time the inhabitants  
of Vanuatu saw a stream of B-52s  
serrating the low clouds above their tiny  
island, they prostrated themselves  
in the yam fields where they stood,  
arms stretched toward the sky.  
While carbon snowflakes fell on their shoulders  
the elders talked about what they had seen,  
sipping gourds of psychotropic kava  
around the black lips of a volcano.

When men in Navy uniforms  
began to emerge from the jungle  
they congregated around them,  
accepting with two hands the gifts  
the multiracial deities generously offered.  
Years after the GIs  
had gone, they continued to perfect  
the rituals they had seen carried out  
by their clean-shaven demigods--  
clearing the emerald chaparral for landing strips--  
raising the state flag of Georgia  
into the cake-yellow canopy of bananas.

The Thuggee of India would watch  
their victims approach from caves  
the wind had carved into the mountain,  
posing as travelers as they  
descended on the weary pilgrims.  
Once they had gained their confidence,  
they strangled their countrymen as they slept,  
silk handkerchiefs threading  
the quiet crackle between bonfires.  
They loaded their cache of jewels

into hidden caravans as they waited for  
Kali, the Hindu goddess of time  
to appear on the horizon,  
from which point they would gaze up  
at the divine under the cover of her feathery skirts.

Before chasing shots of phenobarbital  
with mini-bar-sized cans of pineapple  
juice, members of the Heaven's Gate cult  
donned Nike trainers and purple shrouds.  
In interviews, they had referred to themselves as *vehicles*  
and often cited cave paintings in Italy  
that resembled the extraterrestrial astronauts  
they believed they would someday be reunited with.  
As the Hale-Bopp comet neared the earth,  
members placed a five dollar bill and three  
quarters in the pockets of their sweatpants  
for the cosmic fare they thought would transport them  
to the spaceship trailing the fiery meteorite.

Epicurus invited even women and slaves  
into the secluded gardens bordering  
his commune. The hesitant Stoics watched like deer  
under the olive branches  
as dust motes eddied around the torso  
of the first lecturer of atheism.  
He alleged that religious fear  
was the main cause of human unhappiness.  
That the universe was based on chance events  
and that even if the deities existed,  
they were probably uninterested in our affairs.  
Because they believed in only atoms and the  
void, they knew our souls were safe in the afterlife  
because they wouldn't exist.

The followers of John Frum go to bed each night  
with cobalt paint gleaming on their chests.  
Small boats are moored to the clay  
piers that sulk off the coasts of their island,  
the tins stacked in their homes like rusted bullion.

Can you see them dreaming  
in their radio towers made of bamboo,  
the transistor radios hemmed in close  
to their folded arms?  
The way they wake at dawn  
and walk down to the beach,  
waiting for our promised cargo to appear  
undulating on the waves like a tattered  
messiah?

## Réka's Dream

She dreamt that I was living  
in the basement of a cathedral.  
To visit me,  
she had to climb through a window  
and then through an air duct  
with Rabelais' catacomb bones.  
The church was actually  
a monastery in the Tatra mountains  
where the monks made  
ale and goat cheese.  
No, that's not right.  
I was being held  
against my will  
in the basement  
of a megachurch in France  
and I was getting  
the Hansel & Gretel treatment.  
One day during her crawl,  
she overheard  
the women in the laundry room.  
They speaking in English badly.  
They cackled in French.  
They were anti-Semitic in Hungarian.  
They got tricky and discussed my fate  
within the cult in Slovak.  
She saw one hooded auntie open  
the washing machine door,  
but what the woman dragged out  
was not laundry.  
*Angelology is the study of angels*  
she said, lowering herself  
into my cell.  
*But those women are not angels.*



## **Aegina**

The archipelago was strung out like a necklace.  
You wore a necklace.  
The sunset fell from within us  
like a premonition.

You wore a necklace.  
Children swam naked  
like a premonition.  
It was populated with cats.

Children swam naked.  
My love was a water organ.  
It was populated with cats.  
On each hill lived an abbess.

My love was a water organ  
with no hands but your own.  
On each hill lived an abbess.  
You watched me naked.

With no hands but your own  
we walked arm in arm.  
You watched me naked  
unconscious of living.

We walked arm in arm.  
You were dressed in my perception of you  
unconscious of living.  
The small of your back was knotted.

You were dressed in my perception of you.  
You were naked.  
The small of your back was knotted  
with my desire.

You were naked.  
The ferry was empty  
with my desire.

We swam conscious of death.

## **Kharms**

You die of starvation staggering  
through the fields of a blue notebook,  
carrying chrysanthemums like an infant.  
And the vegetables are mute.  
And the old men play chess backwards.  
And Stalin perspires  
like an emptied glass of vodka.

The old women only speak  
in the simple present.  
This way, they remain eternal.  
And the dead laugh like children,  
except when they remember  
their tetanus halos.  
And there is no end to the beauty  
of Georgian girls tanning in the sun.  
And the universe is always only  
a god's gaze beyond our comprehension.

The girl in front of you at the bakery  
buys you black rye  
and invites herself over to drink.  
And Russia disappears  
because it was never there, poof.  
And those with no teeth  
are reduced to vowels.  
And we are all uneasy with thoughts  
of careening greyhounds.

Natalya, Marina, Tatyana.  
They are all good women.  
They embrace you  
with the chastity of turnips.  
Slowly your heart and their aprons  
become of the same fabric.

And the sky is noded  
with the eroticism of white nights.

And you lose your mind, blindfolded,  
eating endless beets.  
And you forget her birthmark,  
a drifting continent between prison bars.

You sit at your desk,  
inhaling Pushkin and extolling Gogol.  
And today you wrote nothing.  
And yesterday was white contemplation.  
And tomorrow has no memory.

## Budapest is for Haters

I buy a pastry at this bakery every morning. Though I attempt to speak their language, the women behind the counter never smile, wielding giant sheets of strudel. They don't know how old I am on the inside. When I step into this tram car it is 1965. There are two kinds of slacks in the department store. Outsiders called this Goulash Communism, but even I find this offensive. The Erasmus students are the only ones not shadows at night. They are young. Their rented apartments have high wooden doors and interior courtyards that distract from their endless sexing in dark bedrooms. They will bear children red as Cataluña. The Prime Minister sleeps in the Parliament's dome, holding his hand to his heart as nationalists descend on the square. Everyone is smoking. Inside a bar as invisible as an alley. I want to dance with her but the music is distracting. When we did mushrooms I had no thinkings only feelings. Girls with hooked noses are great. Girls with no chin I want to hold under the street lamp forever. The nightbus is so South London. The land lost to Slovakia hurts like a lesion on my grandfather's war jacket. Everyone introduces themselves saying their name backwards. No one speaks English. I grow angry seeing they've translated Shakespeare's first name on the cover. Every time we look at the map this country gets smaller. When my father visits I take his picture on the green bridge. His faded jeans break my heart into seven childhoods. Old men play chess in the thermal baths. The sauna smells of cedar. Don't laugh, this is my baroque Speedo I tell them. I am either hiding everything or nothing. St. Stephen's finger is on a pillow in the Basilica. When I ask for basil in the supermarket I get laughed out. Strawberries go bad in a day. After a dozen my mouth is a lilting velvet. A nursery school takes over the opera house and no one notices. I hop metro turnstiles. Mine becomes a life of cheap thrills. The kebab carousel disapproves and we agree to part indefinitely. I recant and eat a pound of meat, falling asleep in the basement of a Turkish restaurant where I cling to the lamp of a hookah. My heart is a room where the mayor holds a döner knife. He wouldn't dare. I'm the last beacon on this side of the Danube.

## Rayleigh Scattering

I

Gainsbourg's grave is covered with flowers and panties. The paths, like the bones in the ossuary, are unmarked. How lost the living can get. In Père Lachaise we are safe from the Roma, but not in Montmartre. The arms of their ultraviolet children coil and nip as if trying to center their catch in plasma globes. Their mother speaks in tongues. I want to curse her but am unsure how to scream Octomom in any other language. Contrary to what the folk songs would have you believe, gypsies haven't been cool since Django.

II

In the club last night I held the ten-Euro caipirinha above my head and channeled the father delivering cough syrup through the hall of his disco days. But after that many, what gets spilled is not only the drink. In flashes, we watched a couple grinding and placed bets. Epilepsy versus levitation. I was hoping they would play Kanye and Jay-Z. What we got were Koreans holding hands in Notre Dame, marrying each other on the thirty-seven bridges of the Seine. Back in the day, only women wore wedding rings.

III

The macaroons are overpriced but at least you got to eat the whole box. I eat the smear of bone marrow your dad serves up on toast while the table cringes and the American actor who I can't name leads two women out of the restaurant. At 2am, the lights of the Eiffel Tower sparkle and then go off, making our sex organs more obvious. Maman grows embarrassed. In duels, our seconds never arrive. When the individual is disconnected from the physical world the ego refracts wildly and at will. *I* is many others.

IV

Walk away from the crepe stand without paying. Don't interrupt your wife. Let her finish about the paint swatches. Tell into every beggar's cup *lacrimosa* means weeping. Imagine how they feel, the rugby hooligans hijacking the metro. Stop. And imagine how they feel now. Proust, I'm sorry your apartment is now a fucking bank. Let's blame the wandering Jew. When we made love, the opera singer said not *I'm wet* but *I'm watery*. Even in daydreams we never correct each other. I have forgotten why the sky is blue.

## Frankie's Hill (Ferihegy)

They put bars across  
the airport benches  
because they don't want you  
to sleep here.  
No Bake-ancy is the name  
of the snack bar that closes  
when the currency exchange  
runs out of money.  
Up above, the tanning bed  
of fluorescent lights  
is never turned off  
and you nod in and out of sleep  
listening to Eno's  
*Music for Airports*.  
In the afterlife,  
airplane talkers  
will have no armrests  
and thus will float off  
like Texan astronauts.  
You stand with the other specters  
on the tarmac  
at 5 in the morning,  
the sunrise filling your eyes  
like a spiritual grenadine.  
A visual choir  
of reds and oranges  
echoes into the horizon.  
By 6 all is orange juice,  
even if our bodies  
are more than half liquid  
watered down by our mothers.  
If they'd played this album  
over the loudspeakers,  
no one  
would be boarding the plane.  
Translated from the Hungarian,  
the name of this airport  
sounds like a Carpathian dive bar.

## The Merchant of Venice

An aura. An aura emerges  
from under the bridge  
where gondoliers appear  
with their millionaire smiles.  
The pigeons in the Piazza San Marco  
have developed beaks  
that allow them to eat ciabatta,  
and they often choke  
on whole crumbs of air.  
A crucifix is centered on a house  
above a ribcage of bricks  
to remind you that even if  
the devil is in the details,  
the foreheads of old women  
will always smell like God.  
A cat in the night market  
sleeps in the saffron peaches,  
sneezing from the opium pollen.  
The centripetal power of camera flashes  
rings an outdoor string orchestra  
wrapping up the third movement  
of *Souvenir de Florence*.  
When the violins swing  
into the opening notes of *Single Ladies*,  
every tourist shits  
2-Euro coins into their hand.  
Across the lagoon,  
the cranes of Porto Marghera  
prick the double horizon  
like ugly reality holograms.  
Sunlight is a drying marathon  
on a bar countertop,  
where a middle-aged woman  
blows limoncello kisses  
at the teenaged bartender,  
lips round as a shotglass.  
Two Madonna-babies cry  
outside the location



of a future Starbucks  
next to elderly men who  
put out their gray chatter  
in local dialectical ashtrays.  
Drapes are painted onto the walls  
of hotel rooms and Baroque come  
fleck the water of bathroom faucets.  
The men that sell  
imitation bags and watches  
are folding up their blankets,  
speaking French in Arabic italics,  
laughing in the low waves  
that come with the territory  
of spending all day near the water.  
The terraces at sunset  
fill with tomato-nirvana and  
Prosecco corks like fists.  
No one eating  
notices the vendor  
who climbs to the top of the tower,  
replacing the sun with a fake Rolex  
as a giant fuck you for his lot  
on the gaudiest star in the universe.

**For Bernard Loiseau, Who Killed Himself  
Out of Fear that He Would Lose a Michelin Star**

*“The French have enormous faith in it [the Michelin Guide]. French civilization...is now cynical. There’s no faith in the church, everyone assumes politicians are corrupt and spouses cheat. Michelin is the one national symbol of unimpeachable rectitude”  
--Rudolph Chelminski*

**You dropped out**

of gymnasium at fifteen to become a sous-savant in the kitchens of La Maison Troisgros, and we, your growing cortege of foodie gastronomes, assembled nightly to witness the miracles.

**Piles of julienned**

carrots kindling pearly plates. Scallop with fennel and tangerine buoyed to a froth of puréed parsley. Poached pear hearts aspersed in a bath of Burgundy.

**After decades**

of devotion you were knighted with a third Michelin star. You crafted a line of anise-scented perfumes, your smile garnished every box in the freezer aisle and you became the first chef to be traded on the stock exchange.

**You**

were skeptical when the Asian-fusion craze trended from the coast of California to the Gold Coast, when our tastes forced you to mar your menus. And then there were the rumors of an impending downgrade in *Le Figaro*.

**There was the nervous**

breakdown in Kobe, the manic depression, the accumulating debt. The Prozac beading your breast pocket as you looked out onto the dining room. The torture of seeing an unfinished plate.

**Despite your nigiri**

like meticulousness, you were no Picasso. The laboratory kitchens of Ferrán Adrià metastasized in your dreams, forming a nightmare labyrinth of nitrous oxide chimeras speaking in Catalan.

**His six**

hour dinner menus of carefully plotted chemical reactions were the

future-present of cuisine. Cubist cocoons of lettuce and syringes of balsamic to balance pH after every bite. Nitrogen ice cream crafted by blindfolded alchemists.

**We**

didn't find any note in the bedroom where you took your life, the shotgun on the floor in the February half-light. We blamed the journalists, the guide books, the elitism, and occasionally, ourselves.

**Every time**

we see a man dining alone, we assume he is one of their detectives. They only open their mouths to chew, as if the air might corrupt their infallible palates. Like impassive deities they are silent, dressed in gray suits.

**We watch**

their fingers glide over the menu as they order, recalling our catechism books bound with the Sistine Chapel fresco, the way Adam reached across, the finger so close but still never touching.

## The Last Laugh

*"...all but the bones of them has gone out to the world as Durham's Pure Leaf Lard"*  
--*The Jungle*, Chapter 9

They will play back our drive-thru orders  
in slow motion  
to pinpoint the moment  
when human and machine  
became Americana.  
They will ask questions like  
*Where did they put the feeding tube?*  
*Which army did the Surgeon General*  
*lead into Iowa?*  
*What about Upton?*  
*Or should we call him Mr. Sinclair?*  
They will imagine  
the posture of our forsaken prophet  
atop his lardbox, decrying  
The Beef Trust is an oxymoron!

They will comment on the marbling  
of the air, the pickle slices gone hoary.  
American Gothic. Or,  
the daughterless wraith  
of the last independent rancher.  
They will claim they can still taste  
the xanthan gum.  
From the sky  
empty and endless as cornfields.  
The landscape malling into the distance.

They will play the training video  
in a loop.  
The line of cars waiting  
seven miles long  
outside the first franchise  
in Oman.  
Lean finely textured beef  
glowing like crushed beetles from Mexico.

*How else do you think  
they got the strawberry milkshakes  
so strawberry?*

The coins behind the freezers.  
A million head of cattle  
glinting through the glass chambers.  
White for purity.  
Castles for forever.  
They will pull the mascot prototype  
from the closet.  
The red wig draped over  
the collapsed form,  
sagging like a sad Pogo.  
Similarly the condiment udders  
hanging down from the ceiling.

When they are done  
they will take our soft bones out  
with the tub of chicken breast,  
their protective suits  
brushing against the broiler.  
*Imagine what they would've done  
with four stomachs*  
one of them will suggest  
with a psychic shrug.

## Salvage

Just as astronomers calculate  
the age of the universe  
by examining the oldest stars,  
we would gather around  
Great-Great-Uncle Gordon.  
The stiller he stood the better.  
Face as flaky as pink oak,  
mesh hat atop  
a full head of white hair.  
Next to him in the picture  
his wife Bess, sad and touchy  
as an Apache bride.  
Neither of them stand over five feet.  
Some say it is not age  
we shrink from, but guilt.

Mount my terror on driftwood.  
As a three year old  
my young overalled father  
left me to sleep  
in the taxidermied room  
of animals hunted in Alaska.  
Lime cabinets and sulfur hallways.  
The unornate tin ceiling.  
My cheek on the bearskin rug  
as they talk over the Mets game  
in the living room, sipping cans  
of Genesee Cream Ale.  
Boars, antelope, and elk blanket  
the wood paneled walls.  
Though how they gleam,  
we have a way of only  
closing the eyes  
of our own dead.

This is the first time I met him.  
He stands on the riverbank,  
fishing for eels under the moonlight.

Here in Columbia County  
is where the Hudson pools  
before heading for the southern lights.  
The flames of the bonfire already  
lick the rags of the trees  
as someone winds up  
to toss in a Roman candle.  
A horseshoe clangs against a post  
as a fish is thumped against the earth.  
One of the most quixotic invertebrates,  
the freshwater leech sets out  
for a heartbeat in darkness.  
Though he has three mouths,  
having had his fill of love  
he always knows when to let go.

After the family reunion  
we mine the cemetery  
for the flat gravestone of my grandfather.  
After thirty minutes, dad sits down.  
Gordon is reading the stone faces  
of his brothers who died as children.  
Why must the specters of appendicitis  
forever wear pageboy hats?  
During the war he'd built bridges in Italy.  
His only son who committed suicide  
months after his wife died of cancer.  
This child of the Depression  
picking coal that had fallen  
from the passing boxcars.

Once, he'd caught me trying  
to throw out the ends of a bread loaf.  
He eyed me from across the room,  
placing the stale morsels  
into his mouth in silence.  
What we cannot save  
by taking into our own bodies  
waits for us downstream.

## The Three Types of Nothing

If we are to follow  
the logic of Parmenides,  
some form of the Texas PTA  
has always existed.  
The next volleyball match  
between them  
and the cosmologists  
will be held  
in the Milky Way.

The unmoved mover  
is at the helm  
of the stuffed animal crane  
and his stack of tokens  
never diminishes.  
The four-pronged claw  
of time immemorial.  
How it wavers  
before descending.

The plush Galápagos finch.  
That's the negative pressure  
of knowing that  
we don't know.  
The force of dark energy.  
That's the chest that expands  
and contracts like so many  
guttering breaths of universe.

However it needs must be  
that if nothing  
is our past and future,  
our dreams will at once  
be sucked out of the cosmos.  
The tongue at the bottom  
of the ice cream cone.  
The lips eclipsing.  
That's the suction of love.



*But you doth protest  
there is the problem  
of solitary power.*  
And how does  
that make you feel?  
asks Plato,  
paring his nails.  
*What about  
the problem of evil?  
the empirical problem?*  
Heidegger can't hear you.  
His backstrokes splash water  
in your lather of face.

Under the microscope  
God is twitching,  
the bands of DNA  
flowing as if from a child's  
sanskrit hand.

He is spoken:  
First there was  
empty space.  
But even this  
shivers with energy,  
invisible walls  
of particle board,  
and endless vibration.  
This does not  
keep you up at night.  
In the nothing  
without space and time,  
entire universes  
spring into existence  
like so many sheets  
of sudden bubble wrap.  
This does not  
frighten you either.  
But in the free-for-all

that is the multiverse,  
the laws of physics  
are absent  
and the pages  
of our grammar book  
are darkly unwritten.

At four years old  
you would go  
into your parents' bedroom  
at night and ask  
*Where will I go  
when I die?*  
I watched you  
my child.  
My child  
I watched you.  
This kept me up  
at night.  
What to say to me  
if when you see my face  
a palimpsest of tears.

## Marriage Proposal from the Dinosaur Exhibits at the Museum of Natural History

If you think I have been kneeling for a long time in front of the mammoth fossils, remember that the longest prayer in the Bible comes from the book of John and spans twenty centuries. What the brontops and I have in common is that we have both spent time against our will looking into the shale formations of South Dakota. The first wedding bands made by the Egyptians were hemp and lasted a year at most. In the sixth grade, Lindsey Pearson broke up with me because I was too shy to call her. It is staggering how natural selection informs even our tiniest decisions. The mating rituals of flying pelycosaurs are said to have been more elaborate than those of peacocks. Whereas the latter is able to shed its plumage once a year, our more distant ancestors were born to wield giant fins on their backs as if as a testament to love. If it seems odd that the pubis bones of ornithischian dinosaurs faced backwards, consider that the male bowerbird will construct a dwelling of various brightly colored objects to attract a mate. The females back step into the bower, testing the fidelity of the walls, becoming more monogamous every year that the structure does not collapse. At my first winter formal, I held my date's hips, arms forming a broken ring around her snowy dress. As we revolved to Boys 2 Men's *On Bended Knee*, cosmologists were fighting for the right to name their respective books *How to Slow Dance to a Long Song*. If you have ever walked through the deserted arcades of Union Square station on Christmas Eve as the peal of a saxophone softens even the hardest peach stones forgotten under the stairs, you know what I'm talking about. There are so many things frozen in ice that are now beginning to melt. By the time we discover them, it will be too late to put them in museums. The fossils produced from the Hells Creek digs in Montana were enough to fill dozens of train cars. A better word for my posturing on the museum floor would be genuflection. The first time I saw my fiancée, I didn't. Because its originality is so foreign to our experience, we never recognize beauty at first glance.