

HYPOTHESIS

by

Amber L. Cook

A Thesis

Submitted to the

Graduate Faculty

of

George Mason University

in Partial Fulfillment of

The Requirements for the Degree

of

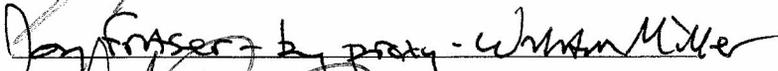
Master of Fine Arts

Creative Writing

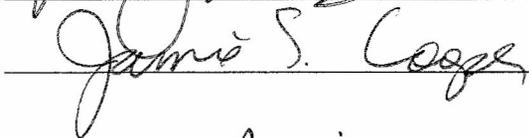
Committee:



Director



Department Chairperson



Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

Date:

April 28, 2014

Spring Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Hypothesis

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts at George Mason University

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Amber L. Cook
Master of Fine Arts
George Mason University, 2014

Director: Eric Pankey, Professor
College of Humanities and Social Sciences

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DEDICATION

For Matthew & all of our musings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'd like to sincerely thank my family and friends for giving these poems the space to grow and bloom. I especially want to thank my colleagues/peers, now friends, for their honesty, encouragement, and for challenging me as a writer. To the faculty and my thesis committee for your unwavering guidance and support—thank you.

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ABSTRACT

HYPOTHESIS

Amber L. Cook, MFA

George Mason University, 2014

Thesis Director: Eric Pankey

The poems that appear in this thesis project explore the intersections between death, the body, the soul, and the physical landscape. By conflating these subjects upon one another, the speaker often speculates about what is natural and unnatural in the dying and decaying process. The world constructed during these ruminations consists almost entirely of metaphors—a place where one thing always refers to something else. Partially eckphrastic, these poems also look at the artistic works of Sally Mann, Tsurisaki Kiyotaka, 20th and 21st doctors, and our own environment. Careful consideration is given to the punctuation within each poem and the form of the poem on the page.

WHAT REMAINS / 1

in the distance:
a body bag filled
with fragments of
the whole. more like
a plaster cast: shell
encasing *large portions*
of the body, sure
to make snug. more
like a caterpillar
tent sailed & sheer
in a tree fork: how
the broadest wall
faces southeast: how
silk is added to
the surface of the
structure each day
and which way is
the sun? what thing
is it that stays in
foreground just out
of focus? I figure it
the foot of that tree:
how the roots reach
on: settle into ground
rich & fresh with rot.

WHAT REMAINS / 2

the skin starts the slow
rot: sags and shapes to
paper pulp strips stripping
off a wasp's nest. next,
note how patched & pocked
the pigment goes: how
pale. the back then like
moon craters: a range
of dimpled depressions
to bowl-shaped basins
begun and rung-out
from the center of
the spine. surely, some-
thing can be found in
those holes like: the
whole of the body gone
missing. like: what I
missed: the hair sapped
to hat the skull cap:
face pressed into peat
and a plea for place:
what's that like? swimming
just below the surface
waiting for the first breath.

WHAT REMAINS / 3

what is it that's swathed
around the body?
say: silk-sack. say
secreted and spun.
inside, I question
what's first undone? I
think: eyes? think: mouth-
parts or tongue? so is
this a swallowing
of? if like a luna
moth, then speculate
a slow dissolve: how
the body becomes
weary and wanders
off. sure then a shift.
sure then & eventually
a nothing left? how
does the earth open
up? how does the dirt
become what it does:
saturated with stay &
rich with rot? I wonder
when the shadow
of the body will go:
soil siphoning out.

SEVEN QUESTIONS FOR THE SOUL

dear soul: there are things I know and things I can't. one: where have you gone wandering? I imagine you stopped to watch the sun sweat down into the mountain's lush green, yes, at the top of mount severance, and yes, to cut yourself loose. word has it in this body that you've often tried to do what other body parts already do: have tried to look out through the eye for instance but also in at the same time. soul: this is not about simultaneity. two: where do you stay? are you coiled in the chest cavity & laced between the ribs, folded like one of Dali's melting clocks? or, have you spread yourself long and wide—part in the collarbone: the calcaneus: cartilage: cochlea: quick—the prairieland opening out? another or: maybe you are floating as the shadow does. maybe you fit alongside. three: have you ever been lost? :: are you in the music? :: do you have your own mate? :: is the body yours? four: describe your physical appearance. is it black orb with boundless edges? are you a color, I mean any/many: aura or aurora borealis: the constantly changing: the failure to commit, but look closely and you'll see cerulean and chartreuse: you'll see them all at once. five: say everywhere present. six: say do you have a say? how are you kept contained? seven: know that I'm watching for what shape you will make in the mold that is the body: waiting for yes's & no's

PETROLOGY

I think of your body as the slow dissolve. not as rock quick-cut & quarried off, no. this erosion has happened over time. the start could be a single salt grain: how it comes in stages. stage one being the initial decline: localized to one part of the body. say stage migration, meaning not only moved but expanded. see the rock face starting to change: know the process is *naturally occurring* and solid: of mineral & mineraloid. this is about the microscopic details: what's not initially seen & what then remains.

BUDANOVA GORA GULLY

it is about how sharp the soil
is carved out and cut: what water stream
caused this bluff to break and how quick
the rush? note the ruts: the *large ditches or*
small valleys made meters deep and wide
eyed. I wonder why the land
let go and where the leftover shown fine
linen laid over this landscape is anything
but smooth. what crabgrass claws at the
crag? what tree and shrub. collection of
stub-remains shortening still.
how like this thing to the skin: sudden
rush that wrecks ruin: the give in to
weather-wearing & warn. what empties
out of what then: what marks its grave?

COMPOSITION

how the body turns to
food for flies: to holes:
the skin is all lace:
face: where the features
go? could've sworn your
eyes were blue: could've

sworn your eyes. how
the earth opens up and
takes the big gulp. add
this variable: rain, then
what? what goes below
stone and wood? we

don't mention how what
gets in gets in. what
exactly rummages through.
see: body as vessel: mode
to travel from one place
to the next: a hollow (or

concave) utensil: a duct
for *just passing*. the mouth
won't tell, but listen:
the micro still migrate:
make vacant less vacant:
endeavor to break down.

FOLLOW-UP FOR THE SOUL

say soul: ask where the fold. where the stitch sewn. where it goes & with what reason to wander. wonder this: how long the stay. how long vacant. how divided from the corporal self: yolk from albumin: gap: distance between wheel spokes: *how many times one quantity is contained within another*: inverse of multiplication. or perhaps you are fruit flesh that is pulled into many parts. part of me thinks that *what we have hitherto called our body is really a scientific construction not corresponding to* the connected: hook & loop: can you be kept contained? I will ask again: postulate place. perhaps in the soft discs between vertebrae, without which the bones would grate together. or in the socketed shoulder: sieving out space. or along the foot's aching arch: cradled in a loose C. see sea as place where you might've gone off. how in some strange way, you could marvel at the dollop of sun among red sky. whoever heard of the sun losing matter at a rate of millions of tons per minute. whoever heard of *mind and matter as merely convenient ways of organizing events*. what mile marked here: note the how measured: the mouth saying *there is not the faintest reason to suppose* anything at all. but still, the imagined anomaly: figure & outline. are the facts fissured? is there a faint reason to suppose that *what happens in regions to which our power does not extend* mend the memory? remember that you cannot know the sequence.

WHAT REMAINS / 4

the marks of the body's
back could be: crow
scratch so sure, the half-
bald head to play the
nest: twigged hair tapered
down the nape of
the neck, yes. or, could
be: cracked leather well-
worn from weather
and which organ is it
that's tethered? I mean
to say attached to
the body still. call it
kidney: call it tiny
bean untucked from
behind back bone. call
up the beak or bite
that bore & burrowed
in: started the *undid*.
is it okay to wonder
the depth? is it okay
to wonder how long
it takes for the rot
to erase the mark like:
acetone to stain.

WHAT REMAINS / 5

the body's mouth is
agape, which I take
to mean a scream? no,
more like a murmur
to mud and maple
leaf, so what words
wandered out? maybe
the mention of how
long gone: what quarry
rocks quick-cut &
carried off? maybe
the query of what
quit keeping up? I
think: heart? think:
lungs? I think how this
process paced and
patterned itself over
the body. I think
how the skull shows
the rot & wear and
I wonder why the hair
& teeth are the last
to leave: permafrost
fixed in the highest
latitudes of land.

WHAT REMAINS / 6

I think: what extremities
are the first to forgo
the whole of the body?
what parts prodded &
pecked at? maybe more
of an inquiry about
what's kept intact beneath
the belly-skin: settling
& sagged. where is
the horizon of the
body's lower half?
where should the sun
crest? say: over muscle
& mass. say: over
gully groove or gash.
I mean to mention
the thigh flesh torn
and tied marked. how
surely, it was the salt
licks that caused the sand
to maim & mar. I
mean to mention how
rot has rooted in
its teeth: the slow
that will not leave.

INERT

how tall the tree stands: what
shadowed: what shallow swallowed
at the root-tips, as if to say earth
eating earth, as if to say the ground
we're standing on gone cannibal.
is it a body taken or placed? think on
what starts the endeavor to break
down: how natural it is and is not to
go from full to fragmented. to look
at decomposition as delicate is to sigh
for the snap of the deer neck: turn
to look the other way: to not see what
has been happening all along: slow
rot raking up the body's clay.

DESIGNATE THE SPACE

as paradisaal, as a paradigm

for which to peer: place for the eyes
and the body to rest: flat and fixed. here,

I question the function of

the milky way or how the rocks are
seen at the water's surface. meditate here

as hawks do in the hunt for

hurt: glade where we now meet to
collect fragments in/out of the periphery:

in/out of the isosceles, as in

having two sides equal: the equal
hand-sized for the carry and keep so hear

this: the tree bark becomes

misty by the river's well, wood
welting deep into the flesh. what is natural

in the doing and undoing? what

closes from the arrogance of
the mouth: a thing to constantly question

the how & the why & the when.

PERMAFROST PATTERN, HIGH ARTIC CIRCLE

the frost fields fissure & figure

into fractures of glass: perennial & polygonal. I mean to mention the mosaicked mass *gone* abstract. say: soil and sediment split, say: rock-rift. does the body liken

this snow-swathed surface to

its skin? how the lines run at length like leaves: feather-veined & reticulate. does the body question what caused the clot: what buried / bordered off? how deep

the slow freeze? how swelled

and heaved? I can speculate the stasis or stay. can say: involving intricacies of ice-wedged cracks. can say: forgotten land looking for the course-cut way back.

CARRY

creek water moving as if to suggest something
cathartic: cause for carrying on:

cause and effect, like my mouth and mind can
not stop asking, so they must

keep on. what properties of the self? of what
matter? of course in reference

to the corporal: who departed from who: of
course inquiry/what is natural:

the body, certainly. the soul, certainly not &
how fictionalized? how figured

as figment/fragment/filament of. perhaps
nothing at all. how does the mind

figure into all of this? say: the connected to
the connected to the connected,

say: the earth's crust: quest for the absolute
cored-center: encircled by all of

the liquid magma. remind yourself of the in-
between: the body en media res.

FOXFIELD PRESERVE

we think on what's seen: black-
eyed susans swimming in big bluestem grass,
coreopsis quarreling with sun-
flower: tall. *there was a bright bit of orange over
there—butterfly weed.* the prairie,
then, is about height: who sees most from far
off, and what gets lost: becomes
the not-seen. there are no monuments, no
polished headstones. no this is
about what is x feet deep: unpreserved and un-
embalmed. the body becomes
root to tree food for bird fruit for earth.
we think on who enters who:
where the soul sieves out and what then, stays.

WHAT REMAINS / 7

what is it that dug
deep into the dead?
say: blowfly or beetle
say: the body *undid*.
at first I figure this body
to be: fork of fallen
tree to be: bark broke
down to cambium &
phloem: the filing
off of. which is to
say a slow stripping
down. which is to
say: layer by layer.
compare the thigh
bone to a boat cleat
so then the muscle
must be the rope that
wraps itself around.
I wonder how long it
took to fray/fade? or
where the missing hand
& foot could go? I
know related to time:
how it lapses/com-
presses to a single sum.

WHAT REMAINS / 8-9

what I first note is
the arm right-angle
bent and broke. closer:
the hand blistered
and swollen. is it
okay to ask when
the rest of the body
will go? is it okay
to stay fixed on
the fat that folds &
flows over the body's
bones? like: creek
water carried over
an outcropped mass.
like: fog curled up
under a jagged-
toothed crag. can my
eyes get right the
dimpled depression
in the dirt? where
the border around
the body bothers &
becomes leaf / litter
becomes busted
branch / bark.

EXPERIMENT

take a *large grasshopper* and place it in the chamber. dispatch
ether. either *expansion of the water vapor* occurs, or not. either
the camera is triggered to take a photograph of the condensation

figure at death, or not. (the condensation figure being the
soul in the process of departure from) some sum of parts that
make up the body, so the body *as a byproduct* to what this is really

about: the thing that does the leaving. the after image
being a shadowy shape coinciding with that which the animal
makes: strange how the shape stays. the figure in the photograph

suggests that the soul does the leaving: suggests there is
movement away. note: space created by the bird that thinks
on transcontinental migration. think of the shape the whole flock

makes: how that bulb of black stays stuck to the sky.

CLOUD CHAMBER

in the most basic form it
is a sealed environment:

used to identify & track
the path of high-energy
particles: kinetic. used to
detect *ionizing radiation*.
so suddenly made seen,
so suddenly made *possible*

& consisting of plastic
or glass which sits on dry
ice. where a dark cloth
becomes *supersaturated*
with alcohol: where that
cloth is placed around /
within the container

to photograph the thing
inside. what kept contained?

the soul's sieve out of?
how shown on the water
vapors' small seeds? I try
to trace where you, soul,
might've gone: finger
circling somewhere far

& near the top. as the
alcohol evaporates out of
that cloth & condenses:
as the alcohol reaches

the cold regions of the
container's floor: droplets

determine through a unique
form of measurement meant

to slow the fade: the
meander from, then go.
how long does the sit
still last? think on how
similar to the sea and
then think on what

can be seen against the
black back. see trail markers
showing the way through
the woods. how if I follow
I will find that there is no
exactness: no definite depth

to show the collision: two or more
bodies *exerting forces on each other.*

DR. WATTERS, 1933

hypothesis: souls (human or otherwise) exist in the space between atoms: made then, of matter. if of matter,

then of material meaning said soul can be *physically touched* and figure then that everything in the universe is

made of matter, and so? I keep thinking of this course as coaxial: soul in between atoms within each cell:

the connected to the connected to and calculate how close you need to come to see. hypothesis: the

cloud chamber system functions as space for the soul's sieve out of the body. note the *airtight glass in-*

side of which animals were guillotined or gassed, which is to say the doctor did the doing (which is to say his

dig until what's discovered is.) and note the photograph taken *immediately* after: the image that would

not appear until the exact moment of death: the image of the soul so say fold: ask where the stitch

sewn. see via photo that the soul is only made visible by the medium of water vapor: the lighter than

air convection currents that can lead to clouds.

21 GRAMS

to measure the mass lost: to
see what becomes the body: what
of: what departed from. we
ask to know what gone. see: six
patients in the process of.
know that because of the doctor:
because of tuberculosis:
because of the *already* dying, it was
relatively easy, meaning with
no great labor or effort: effort this:
how could the body not be
laborious? lungs licking back at the
cavity that is chest: the request:
to be able to determine when death
was here, now and only a few
hours away, and then? the entire
bed of those said: scale'd/
weighed to determine. the industrial-
sized eye doing the squinting
to speculate down to the very gram.

DOG SOUL, 1907

hypothesis: if the soul has mass & if the soul
departs from the body, then so

does the mass meaning: something found in
the weighted: the wait for death.

see: fifteen dogs, and ask how they died? it
is only known that they were

vitiating by the use of *two drugs* so as to impair
the quality of? sure, to keep still:

sure, to make stiff the limbs. sure, to secure
the *necessary* quiet needed to carry

the experiment out: to further *freedom* from
struggle. note: *it is likely that these*

agents also killed but what does it mean to be
unsure? this is about the absence

of movement, and then the absence of
animal, and then the absence of

the soul. say: surrounded by every *precaution*
to obtain accuracy and yet resolve

that the results are *uniformly negative* meaning
there is no loss of weight at

death, so what? what this seems to show is
the seam coming unstitched: a

lack of loss which does suggest a *psychological*
difference between the human &

the canine: the hierarchy higher, still. which

is to say the separation starting

to sift its way out. perhaps then pertaining to
the process of the mind? how

function of awareness fluctuates between
two things seen / not seen.

HOW TO RETREIVE THE SOUL

soul, perhaps you are found in the hide. how like an animal. say: flesh and fat removed using *quick strong strokes*: dirt and blood washed away *naturally* before the start of the slow rot. when holes are bored along the edges and twine ties you out to dry: when you are stretched as long as you are perhaps wide, I think on how transparent. like: the moon's move to block out the sun: the *much fainter* corona conceding the whereabouts as in here all along. yes, left for days depending. i ask what is felt during this practice? perhaps the path and the first contact: hair stood on end then scraped off to safeguard the tanning solution's soak through skin, and what solution is applied to you, soul/hide, is found in step five: *to brain* meaning to use the animal's mind. the mind being just *big enough* to tan the entire. the organ's oils massaged in order to make more malleable: permanent press out of shape. ask which the soul makes? and recall the weight put back on the drying rack. the soul then softened with sticks: the soul then smoked on either side. *lest we not forget* the soul's holes which are stitched up/sewn. if at all necessary, the soul can be smoothed with a sandpaper square: the thicker sections shaved off. so perhaps the search is about sequence? yes, soul, perhaps you are parsed out through process. say: various stages. say: *a series of steps to preserve* something

SOUL OF SHEEP

commit this to memory: there is no
evidence to suggest a soul.

hypothesis: *a soul portal formed upon
death, which whisks the soul away.*

as if to say that sheep-soul creates
mass at death: a more than:

a tipping over. at last, the then what
as if to ask: where the mass

disappeared to *shortly thereafter*. I do
not know what is added /

accumulated. I do not know what
is subtracted from what.

hypothesis: the soul simply sifting
through, as if to suggest

from the corporal self, as if to say
catch me if you. & count

the seconds gone from the body
that doesn't know where

gone. recall the self outside the
self: process of wander /

stray: then, the return to stay:
nautilus shell spiraled in.

hypothesis: what it really comes
down to is space created:

in/out of such things like: soil:

like the smooth sole spot

at the bottom of your foot. this
is about finding such place.

hypothesis: there will always be
such a questioning: always

be a duel for what sieved itself
out of who.

WHAT REMAINS / 11

what's here is a tiny
sun-sliver eclipse
of flesh, split. how like
this thigh-gash to sink-
holed mass. I consider
what caused the collapse?
call it: common. call it:
corrosion of the earth's
surface-crust. I think
of the *slightly* soluble
bedrock. I think then
maybe more like a tree-
knot? how the bark
around the breach is
bound to break open
and apart. what then
to keep the in from
spilling out? I can say
sap. I can say because
of the heart's ceasing to
circulate, yes of course.
can I ask what the body
feels face-down? call it:
dirt/damp. call it: worm/
weed weaving through.

WHAT REMAINS / 12

what makes the skin
of the body's foot
drip? I imagine
wax & wick: a waning
away from. say: snake
that starts the shed &
shrug. say: bird un-
feathering and ask:
what does it mean to
give up the lived-in-
already? to cast cells
of the self off of? I
think on a skiff set
out towards that
oceaned orb of sun
and wonder what
waves and salt licks
will ban the boat
from doubling back.
call it: surrender.
call on the body to
say, yes, here marks
the start of the slow
rot: here comes the
endeavor to forget.

WHAT REMAINS / 13

here the body laid
sullen and sidelong,
ear to ground so
listening for what?
perhaps the cicadas'
slow strum: string
plucked & pining on.
or perhaps a whisper
from what's already
withered: bark/branch
of a walnut tree:
stone/sediment fixed
at the bottom of
some far-off creek. I
consider the body's
back turned which I
take to be the language
for loss. which I take
to mean a meander
from. how like a worm
that wandered out
of the soil: saturated.
how like the body to
stay stuck/shrivel up.

CONCIOUS

she pictures the body in the ocean, floating on spine & with eyes pointed towards sky: the wide expanse of it, yes. this is how the body is made small: in the swallowing of: in degree. she sees the body as looking down itself: chin tucked to chest to get the panoramic persona in view: arm connected to torso as foot is connected to leg: the *I can't get any closer*. the hover over. to not know what it is to drift out to sea translates to: not knowing what the body can and does turn into: how the fat gets heavy with wet: how the body could sink: slowly cover with sediment

HUM

call it calamity: a plane
goes down in the ocean &
your body is all shard/
scrap: sinking to sand &
you couldn't be found for.
I recall the process of salt-
water on your flesh: how
grain ground against. how
skin turned from fat to wax:
how you were *recovered*.
as if to say a whole body
means a mind mended. as
if to say where your bag of
bones was placed instead.
see: ground. see: stone. say
the stone is small & hot from
sun: smooth. say the stone
shifts over finger & palm:
substitutes for the mouth:
for syntax over tongue. the
hum: low & continuous at
the back of the throat.

BIMMAH SINKHOLE, OMAN

here the wide eye of the earth
opens up. here, the socket carved out by
conduits *conveying* water or other through
the cracks. I mean to mention the cause
for collapse: how the bedrocked brow is
broke down & whittled away
at. which is to say: seep and also slow.
which is to say *a series of* shifts in the soil
and sand. I wonder what it means to go
without warning? how the wet swells up
& swallows the body whole. I
wonder how long this cave/cavity was
concealed under the crust/skin or how
to keep the out from coming in? call it:
a stay away: a surrender to the sinking

ADIPOCERE

sometimes formed from soft
tissue: decomposed. compose
this: cement-like cocoon cast
onto the remaining. query
about what crystallizes: what
dusts the bones with blue
mineral deposit. concentrate
on how long gone: *thinking*
then this body must be some
months or even some sum
of fragments and how *it is*
absolutely clear that skin
saturates: becomes heavy
with: that this is not a fresh
body. to not know exactly how
long it is to drift out at sea.

IN STONE

where the soul does go: of course, only after death, of course only according to some: emptying into a slab or slate: still, the most *cynical of us are trying to save our souls / damn other's souls /* find the hole: the where stitched in. as if to say: it's not really there, but—. it's hard to say exactly when. it's hard to say *the idea of the second self come into play*: only with language to say so. don't forget the stitch sewn/the fold. simpler: the idea might be the product of *too much brain and too much free time*. see: salvageable: the act of saving a ship from perils on the sea: consciousness carried

DR. KOROTKOV, 2013

hypothesis: the soul leaves the body slowly: a sieve out
that starts in the stomach then shifts to the skull. I

wonder why these *parties* mark a place where the *life force*
is first to part. how is the travelling through limbs

parsed out? and how does electrical discharge dictate this
departure? what is seen is an outline like: sunlight

through the shutters: slow peek spreading across the hard
wood floors. like: some shadow behind the silk

screen divider that I can just barely make out. or like:
crepuscular rays radiating from a single point in

the sky. the why after why. what is seen is seen by way of
a photograph taken at the *exact moment* of death:

the soul shown in deep blue at the absolute cored center.
how *precisely* like the flower: the *long and slender*

throat trying towards *unknown depths* so yes to the gradual
good-bye, then gone. yes to the soul's shot at

leaving a left behind: something to say yes, here.

MORNING GLORY POOL, YELLOWSTONE

it is about how concentrated

the color is at the center: chlorophyll &
carotenoids like cartographers: a map
made in microbial mats: causeways for
the bright blue hue: what stays buried.

I wonder when the pool went

into full bloom: concession to open in-
stead of close: the corolla composing a
whorl: pattern of spirals pulled from
a single swelling. how swift the sway &

the shift away. note how hasty

the heat hurries off: how temperature
tells of trouble. think on how alike this
process is to the human body: how
after, nothing is ever the same.

WHAT REMAINS / 14

here: two lake craters
carved & cut/in lieu
of your eyes. here
only the hollow. how
the sockets seem to
be filled up with fog.
no, more like sand
spilling out of an hour
glass so as to say some-
thing about how many
seasons have lapsed? I
think about how time
ticks and twine-ties
over itself. I can say:
the hair still skull-
sapped. I can say: skin
swathed over the bones
like burlap. no, more
like pock marks made
from seepages in
seabed sediment. can
I figure when the body
will follow suit? like:
silt stirred up after
an outpour of storm.

WHAT REMAINS / 16

what has done this was
the sun, sure. so skin
starts to give under
umber: the face darker
still. how fixed the mouth:
open maw meaning
into something felt to be in-
satiable and how still
the limbs are alongside
the body: how gapped
the thigh muscle is from
bone: place where
the flesh opened up to
food for flies: to desert
cracks. how the rift
keeps widening and will
eventually become a new
ocean, *researchers say* . I
wonder what texture
this all becomes: what
it feels like to the
touch? how it could be
anything like: quarry
dust or bark plates
peeled off of a birch.

WHAT REMAINS / 17

there is a difference
between what is seen
and what is not. first,
the blur: how the eyes
can't get it right: en
media res meaning in
the gray space between
black and white: between
two things and those two
being the railroad tie
and track: ask where to?
ask: how long gone? think
of the train's distant whir.
the thing that becomes
clear is the concave
socket where the eye used
to be: the jaw-skin
starting to rot it's way
off the ramus: the
molars in their march
beyond the lip that
was once a lip. then,
what's been apparent
all along: the hair
still fully attached through
follicle to scalp to skull.

REVELATIONS

so seen is the body's
abdomen opened
like a coin purse: no,
more like an oyster
stuck shut then
shucked: no, more
like a mountain
milked of mineral. I
mean to say how like
this gash to gully:
to ask what is found
at the very center? call
it penny or pearl: well
of water come to
wash away. does the
body know where
its organs go and
why? where intestine
& stomach & spleen?
the slow sieve out so
is this process about
the give or take? I think
the body must feel
how empty: how easily
split at the very middle.

RIGHT HAND

is torn off from the
arm: is torn off from
the body meaning
separated through
tendon & muscle &
nerve: a system of
ropes and pulleys
frayed. see how this
fragment of the whole
looks to be floating
against the black back
that is street. fingers
figured into a sign
which is to say: which
way is the rest of
my body going? or:
hand me the rest of
my bone: reconnect
the marrow & tissue:
cancellous/compact/.
subcondral. see
the fingers crawling
toward: how the gold
ring guilds the pinky:
concealing something
of such little worth.

WHAT REMAINS / 20

what's seen is pure
skeleton and striation
of muscle: think on
the linear furrows
found within slate: what
shows the weathering?
what causes the wither
down? how like the slate
flakes are to skin, and
how like what is left
is left: husk of the body
stripped away. think
then on the final
figure: foundation
for which the flesh
first fixed itself on-
to. to say that this
happened *tout de suite*
suggests a lie low:
to not know. see
the skull. how still:
how hollow the body's
become: *the sum of its*
parts as a less than or, a
glass of water tipping over.

SELWYN ROCK, INMAN VALLEY

when the sunlight catches on
the rock now gouged out & gashed, note
the ripples. like: the tide come home to
nest. or: a collection of chainmail chinks:
how the metal mesh moves from form.
note the shape that fragments
make: what exactly marred & marked? I
mean to ask what affects rate of *abrasion*
on skin, then bone. factors include: how
thick: how worn away already: how little
or how much pressure there is
to paint-stroke a pattern in the body like
leaf shadow left on concrete and what
starts the shift? call it *grain of quartz*; call
it tiny rivers of rivulets forged through

WHAT REMAINS / X

the back is spotted with
something like black
mold spores sitting on
the skin: brood of bruise.
I wonder how precisely
placed or how far flung
this body was? is it
impolite to ask how
and why? why the neck
arched up from the
earth and eaten away
at? still, some features
fixed like: the eyes I
could've sworn you by
like: each ear so what's
there to hear? here in
in the very heart of.
the brow furrowed
and faced forward,
fixed on the forest
during fall. and how
like the hair to linger
until left as the last
licked lot: satiated by
the hope for snow.

AERIAL VIEW OF MIDWAY GEYSER BASIN, YELLOWSTONE

it is about depth: how deep

the spring dips down in the middle: fall
from and into blue: how microbial mats
show the slow fade: what is pigmented
by: where a color circles in—concentric.

I do not ask who or why do

not think on the ratio of chlorophyll to
carotenoids: how things get caught and
echo on. from not-so-far-off it looks
unexpected: looks like the didn't-see-it-

coming. somewhere, your

body has forgotten what it means to be
measured by change: curve representing such a
rate. somewhere, your body is made of
slate & has already flaked off in the dirt.

WHAT REMAINS / Y

the body is barely
exposed if not for
the white t-shirt pulled
up at the shoulder
opening a small
sliver of backflesh
like a crescent moon
first visible after
the new: waxing as
if to say *the illuminated
area is increasing* in
size. how the surface
of the skin shows
the seize of strain:
when the muscles let
go. how staring long
enough will show
the right arm broke
off from the body:
parallel lines of bone
running lengthwise
until at last, the gully
grove left in the middle:
worn weighing through.

SOUL SOUND

if the soul had a sound, it would be
a cacophony twisted on the tongue:
sap pooled at the center like sweat
beads of blow rock stippled among
I don't know what. louder still: the
strings' persistent pulse stuck like a
series of sirens keeps ringing on so
what we come to know: that drone

a hum: low and continuous: concentrated to
the whole honeybee hive searching for sugar
water. or, a whoosh: the sea's seethe through
the sand, or the foot's first stand: that single
thump. or, a slow strum seeping through the
sitar's song: sweet like star fruit. recall how a-
like the sparrow. what scale swallowed by
and then, the dying down: a sink's slow drip

BIOGRAPHY

Amber L. Cook received her MFA in poetry from George Mason University and was the 2013-2014 Poetry Thesis Fellow. While at Mason, she also taught English composition and literature courses and was the poetry editor for *So to Speak* journal. She was born and raised in Long Valley, NJ and attended Susquehanna University where she earned her BA in Creative Writing and English-secondary Education.