

All Things Go

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

By

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Spring Semester 2015  
George Mason University  
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## **Dedication**

This manuscript is dedicated to my father, Kirk, and my mother, Meridee, who raised me to feel, for better or worse, compassion for all things.

## **Acknowledgments**

I would like to thank Susan Tichy for directing me during the creation of this manuscript and for helping to evolve my ideas and my poetry. Without her, I would still be writing like Coleridge. Next, thanks go out to Sally Keith for teaching the first workshop in which this idea took root and for allowing it space to grow. Thanks also to Michael Malouf, whose lessons on Modernism had more to do with this manuscript than he probably thinks. Finally, a very special shout-out and thanks go to the George Mason University MFA graduates of 2015 and 2016, who provided irreproachable criticism and unending support throughout this entire process.

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## **Abstract**

ALL THINGS GO

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This thesis uses poetry to explore the role the media plays in mass tragedies, particularly mass shootings, and to pose two central questions: What leads a person to commit such a violent act, and do these tragedies matter in the face of larger natural phenomena, such as the cycles of plants, seasons, and planets? A fictional persona, Garret, is used to represent the type of person who others may interpret as capable of committing such a violent act, and to explore the psyche and actions of such an individual. By intermingling poems from within and outside Garret's perspective, poems from the apparent poet-speaker's perspective, and poems from unknown or ambiguous perspectives, the thesis aims to raise questions regarding the legitimacy and believability of any one viewpoint as well as questions regarding the distinguishability, or lack thereof, between the viewpoints. Ultimately, the thesis struggles to assert both the forgettable nature of these tragedies and the hope that they not be forgotten.

## Forgiveness

I'm horrified I wanted  
    provocative scenes  
I wanted  
    the memories they evoke  
and taking advantage of these  
  
    it's all anyone is talking about

an apology a contribution  
    never brings peace  
their commitment  
    to forgive  
to fictionalize a tragedy like that

    there are people who have

    the hypocrisy of leadership  
        must be extracted with care  
with humility  
        I realized

        the rest of us take

until after the end  
    we didn't realize it  
I didn't even know how to respond  
    why did it happen?

        but I would trade places

upon being confronted with a traumatic event  
    we are called  
their only son  
    and applied to other circumstances

        will I be able to cope?

I haven't done anything  
    and they don't like it  
the pastoral is a fictionalized projection  
    the families know about it

        yet in our culture we are just

tacked onto their fabric  
    for not seeing that  
he was hopeless  
    I will never forgive myself

        and I see hope

if that could help  
there's no place else to find any good  
the lessons of grace  
they need to believe

and memories they evoke

for which I need forgiveness  
I would have the same  
with them in a heartbeat  
it doesn't replace, it doesn't—

what happened

**Mrs. Gaarde**

(February 13, 1951–September 16, 2013)

Yesterday she watched the baby bluebirds  
fly out of the birdhouse in the yard.  
For weeks she had been reading  
about Syria and gas, suicide  
bombers and peace. Hope  
of progress. But  
the bluebirds  
were born featherless  
at the bottom of a wooden box  
and so she had spent an hour every afternoon,  
camera in hand, watching the mother,  
waiting for her to fly  
away so she could lift  
the lid on the box and take  
another picture.

The first time she wrenched the nails from their housing  
she thought the birds were dead. They lay in a pile  
of pink flesh and purple veins. Their breaths  
were shallow—the sound, hollow.  
Snowden is being protected  
by the Russians. We are  
bombing Afghanistan  
again.

She hears her husband sigh that the world  
is a scary place to be. She agrees. But look,  
see the bluebirds watching over their children  
from the roof? The parents fly down and perch at the entrance  
of their home, chirping their song. Put down the newspaper.  
The dream is dreamy, and life is long.

## **Dystopic Rhymes**

Distrust closure. Every piece  
of writing is hyperaware of its own  
construction in the way a person  
or building is not. Take me  
in your hand, the report  
blares, and turn me around  
until you understand me perfectly.

Feel free to reprimand  
the facts as if they were  
children, disobedient  
and unaware. Nobody  
will blame you if one or two  
never come home.

A chain of hearts is framed  
in a glass chamber. It beats  
on the mantelpiece next to austerity—  
an award for only releasing  
the salient.

What do you believe?

## In the Entrance of the Atrium, Washington Navy Yard

The sun does not struggle  
to discover its own origins  
nor does it worry over the cataclysm  
of its end—like flowers dropping  
their seeds in wet dirt  
on their way to rebirth.

Neither has an emergency  
evacuation plan. We have  
traced the sun's heritage  
back as far as we can go,  
but we do not know the real  
core, the single quark that sparked  
it all into life. The word *baluster*  
comes from the French *balustre*,  
from the Italian *balaustro*, from *balaustra*,  
“pomegranate flower,” for a resemblance  
to the swelling form of the half-  
open flower.

Above a red pool of splayed  
petals, the air is tinted blue by the clear  
sky arcing through a wall  
of windows.

The black barrel sticking between  
the thin balusters above  
shattering the air, the running  
and the reverberation of glass  
and floors, smell of sulfur, holes in doors  
and windows and bodies, recall what we thought  
was very far away.

## **Viewmaster**

Let us observe things  
through various lenses:  
feminist, nihilist,  
psychological, social,  
Saussurian, Freudian,  
and so on.

Let us equip ourselves  
with the particulars  
of each kaleidoscopic turn  
as we click and change  
from picture to picture.  
And so on

we move from viewing  
a body as victim  
to a body as victimized  
or a body as commodity.  
Or we choose not to  
look at all.

We move through  
the muddled images  
snapped and shot  
as though we were  
not missing anything.  
Look at all

the gone people  
and things waiting  
to be noticed. We pay  
attention to the wrong  
perspectives, to cracked  
lenses filled with  
consistencies in conflict:  
structuralist, formalist,  
Marxist, new historicist,  
mythological, deconstructionist,  
and so on.

## **Conflict of Indifference**

*His actions have had a profound and everlasting effect on the families of the victims. I don't know why he did what he did, and I'll never be able to ask him why. Aaron is now in a place where he can no longer do harm to anyone, and for that I am glad. To the families of the victims, I am so, so very sorry that this has happened. My heart is broken.*

*He talked about 9/11 and where he was and how the buildings had collapsed and he couldn't believe that...and how he was upset with the terrorists for taking innocent lives.*

*He did have the tendency to feel like people owed him something all the time.*

*I knew he was not happy with America and he felt slighted as a veteran and he was ready to move out of the country.*

*He would get really quiet sometimes, put his head down. You would see him in thought but not in rage, not angry at the world.*

*...didn't seem aggressive to me.*

*There is no evidence or information at this point that indicates he targeted anyone he worked for or worked with. We do not see any one event as triggering this attack.*

*Bottom line is, we need to know how an employee was able to bring a weapon and ammunition onto a DoD installation, and how warning flags were either missed, ignored, or not addressed in a timely manner.*

*No detail is too small.*

*There are indicators that Alexis was prepared to die during the attack and that he accepted death as the inevitable consequence of his actions.*

*Yes, we all missed something, to be sure, but we did what was required. We conducted the investigation that was required by the investigative standards...Should we be required to get police reports, for example? Should we be required to get mental health information even from someone who has a secret as opposed to a top secret clearance? All these things need to be looked at. But it was not, in our view, a case of malfeasance...We believe the contractor did what they were supposed to do.*

*I do get concerned that this becomes a ritual that we go through every three, four months, where we have these horrific mass shootings. Everybody expresses understandable horror.*

*...no problem there.*

## **In the Entrance of the Atrium, II**

Silence originated  
before sound.

In space, sound cannot travel—  
nothing for it  
to travel through.

Impacts  
echoless.

In our own vacuum, everything takes  
on the shapes of stalks and petals widening  
and narrowing, of balusters now growing bulbous  
to support the weight they carry, now crumbling  
to ash under their own gravity. Reporters'  
keyboards click long into the night, ricochet  
like shrapnel through lonely offices.

On the beige floor a red skirt  
falls like the pomegranate flower  
next to bloom, arrayed in pink hues  
due to light dazzling through the crack  
in the window shades. Her breath  
is shallow. Near her,  
someone is saying:  
Please be quiet.  
So he doesn't  
come back.  
Please.

The *balaustra*  
in a crimson dress  
sewn from fallen petals and shoots  
is silent. She had not meant to echo so  
soon into the vacuum, half-open,  
her life-kissed pistils falling,  
turning to dust in the cold light  
burning through the window.

## **Mr. Gaarde**

The nest is empty  
save for debris and excrement  
lining the walls and piling together  
to form a bed. No one will ever sleep  
here again. The mother bluebird has flown  
and there is nothing left to care for. He looks  
for their faces everywhere. In the garden the flowers  
have all bloomed and withered.

When he dreams he sees her  
smiling close to him. She is wearing  
the red dress she bought thirty years ago  
and asking if the bluebirds ever come back  
to visit. He shakes his head. "No," he hears himself  
whispering into her ear. "Or if they do, I cannot see them."

She hands him a picture from the day before they left.  
When she had lifted the lid then, the hatchlings had gaped  
their yellow mouths toward the sky. In the picture he can see their hunger  
for something she could not give. Around him the roses and the marigolds are blooming  
and some exotic flower he cannot name. She closes her eyes, lays her hand on his cheek.

## Premises

The seasons began with a whimper  
of starvation—the seeds of winter  
planted under the tongue in a beggar's  
bargain. Freedom is worth such yawning  
bites, such long periods of thaw  
that vegetation seethes at the surface in swaths.

On the icicle blue lips of the stolid and the squeamish, fleeting  
snow falls—the scene frozen in the eyes  
of the viewers fleeing. Time passes. New sights and new minds  
assert the relevance of these past events.

Spring arises in a bed of flowers, the dirt  
simpering with a dozen different thoughts—  
how to pull the maw of earth  
back below; how to again draw  
forth leaden elements; leap into autumn's  
decay. The days grow longer.

At the temples of stone and sweat, heat sips—eyeless and eyeing  
drip effort, attempt to delay a turn to rubble. Someone with wings on his heels  
and high cheek bones flies to the last grain of salt and sand. A child  
stamps on molten ground while a woman waves from a parapet

bubbling over with loneliness. Impermanence  
tastes like pomegranate seeds and the seasons  
eat away the flesh. In the foreground, actors moan until  
dawn or dusk based on when the scenes regress.  
One slips back to the dressing room  
listless to remove her husk.

Another takes this  
opportunity to cover  
her in rust.

## **At the Memorial for the Navy Yard Shooting**

President Obama insists there is nothing  
routine about this tragedy. But there is.

Tragedies by their nature only resist regularity  
by mimicking the movements of the sun, by being

perceived from different places at different times.  
What is a tragedy except a sun rising

or setting with a specific observer who cares deeply  
about that sun? And do you and I see with different eyes

or are the colors passing through our cones and retinas not the same  
this overcast September afternoon? The morning of the shooting

was beautiful, a heavy fog hung in the air and the sun rose  
into the sky like the fruit of the dead, pomegranate-red and sliced

at the abdomen by the Earth, but gaining ever more of itself back.  
A lone bluebird caught the wind and winged across the field.

...

It's easy to miss a picture of these things, and before long the sun  
is at high noon and casting tiny overhead spotlights down on all

the unsuspecting people. We are told not to look directly for fear  
of the light that blinds, but we do. Vision stays, though the rays

leave dark spots. While evacuations take place and bodies are tallied,  
hearts of stars floating in the immeasurable blackness burn

in indifference, their warmth radiating under our skin and crawling  
with life as if to remind us light in dark places is only perceived. We set

the dinner table, watch the sky drain to viscous red as the sun  
looms on the horizon, where things always look bigger, and forget

how many routine tragedies we are experiencing at this moment.

## **Garret Contemplates the Towers**

When the towers fell I felt nothing  
and at first I thought I was watching  
a movie. It was exciting, and yes I  
remember the plumes of smoke  
billowing out as one by one they  
curled down and into themselves  
like black snake fireworks expended  
and hollowed out to ash.

I had pretended to be sick that day  
and was more concerned about  
why they weren't playing  
cartoons. Every channel, there were  
or were not the twin towers, and  
a hole in the Pentagon. Every  
second, I expected this to  
sink in.

Recently I went to New York  
for no particular reason  
and walked right past  
the reconstruction site.  
The memorial signs  
are not as obvious  
as one might imagine

but on the ground the ashes still kindle  
their imprints into permanence  
like the immovable shadows  
of Hiroshima, and the pools  
thick as glass  
fester with coins  
reflecting nothing.

## I Don't Like Mondays

Gay from birth.  
Father and I slept  
on the same mattress  
in a dilapidated house  
riddled with empty bottles.

Years later—  
he slapped—physically and sexually—  
they don't believe.

I wouldn't believe. Branded  
using hot wire. No  
parole. Easy targets.

Temporal lobe. Bicycle accident.  
Children just wounded. Only  
adults. Used drugs, alcohol.  
Clean screen. No toxicity.  
Why lie?

...

In *Office Space*, Peter Gibbons threatens to use a machine gun  
against his coworkers. The monotony of daily life in a world  
where you are not invisible, worse—unappreciated, looked  
down upon, depreciated, deprecated, spat on—makes a person  
think this way. His coworker says, *Sounds like somebody's  
got a case of the Mondays*. He holds up his hands as if to say:

Bang.

*Sounds like somebody's got a case of the Mondays.*

Bang.

*Sounds like somebody's got a case of the Mondays.*

Bang.

...

I don't recall making that remark. I recall  
asking for a radio. He bought me  
a gun. Christmas 1978:  
a Ruger 10/22 semi-automatic  
.22 caliber rifle with a telescopic  
sight. Five hundred rounds  
of ammunition. I felt like he wanted me  
to kill myself. I did.

What did it matter? What does it matter?  
I wanted to be on TV. I wanted to  
do something big. I hated  
the police. I wanted  
to die. Why  
did I do it?

I don't like Mondays.

## **Garret Drives to Work**

Garret rolls his window down to give the finger to the person who just cut him off. He checks his rear- and side-view mirrors to make sure he isn't about to get run over, then opens the door, puts the car in park, and gets out.

He knocks on the window of the offending vehicle, gently. The person inside looks surprised and confused, hesitates before rolling down the window. Garret throws his hands around the person's neck. (Is it a man? Is it a woman? It doesn't matter. Garret is laughing too hard to notice or care, and either way, Garret is all about equality.)

His grip tightens, his long fingernails pick up bits of flesh and hair. Other people are honking their horns now, and somewhere behind him a voice is yelling to please let go. The voice in front of him is trapped in the sputtering blue throat of a thick-veined face, eyes bloodshot and closing,

or

Garret turns up the radio, takes a series of deep breaths, keeps driving.

## **Maintenance**

Flippant indiscretion. Purposeful disloyalty. What will you do with a job and a degree? The stories may be real or not.

Profit, profit, profit. Push the paper. If the paper doesn't exist, push the web site, the ads, the televised news. Push the organization, whatever you think that is.

On the brink of destruction, make something up. Change justifications. Seek conflagration.

Profit, profit, profit. Push the agenda. If the agenda doesn't exist, remember what you learned in school: Anything can be made true with the right argument and evidence. Study the Sophists.

Draft an addendum. Fake some memoranda. What is intellectual theft when you're grifting for authority? Ideas don't exist.

Profit a final time. Steal the photos. Steal the videos. Steel yourself against the backlash. It will be temporary as the story you release. But make it count.

The gift of submission does not uphold itself, it must be laid down leisurely with a smooth foundation.

## **Garret Picks Up the Snapping Turtle by Its Tail**

and throws it against the sewer wall.  
An audible crack echoes down the hollow tunnel  
as the small thing slides back to the ground.  
Garret chuckles and smirks, then walks  
to the spot where it fell.

Movement?

One leg begins crawling forward, slowly,  
then another. Thick liquid  
is oozing out of the broken shell  
and onto the grimy surface  
below. Garret frowns at the turtle's steps.

Movement.

He picks the creature up  
and hurls it against the wall  
again, harder this time.  
Again the crack, and the liquid  
streak running down the cement.

Garret doesn't look down, just  
picks up a rock as big as his head  
and heaves it onto the cold-  
blooded, unsuspecting  
thing.

## **A Heron**

has landed on the water.  
In perfect silence the bird  
stands on scaled legs that hook  
into the mud for balance.  
Reverie is the thing that's dripping  
from the humid air hanging  
over the pond. The bird  
feels it too. It has been  
there long enough that the ripples  
no longer echo out from its  
landing point, and mosquitos  
join with gnats in the reeds.

They hover in black clouds.  
This is where the fish hide,  
but one without fear will always  
venture away from the middle  
of the pond, out from the heart  
of the thing. And the heron  
will reach down, its orange beak  
spiking into the shallows,  
and swallow it whole.

## **Garret Cuts His Hand Open Trying To Climb the Barbed-Wire Fence**

bordering the neighborhood pool. He doesn't notice  
until he's walking home two hours later and his friend  
points out the steady stream connecting finger  
to sidewalk. Garret looks down and  
sees red, recognizes sticky, wonders how he  
missed it—how he missed so much of it.

Along the road wooden signposts  
list things lost and offer rewards  
for their safe return. Garret wrenches  
one of these off its nail and ignites  
the edge. Nobody is missing  
anything. In the dark, embers fall  
from the paper like sunlight.

His face is deathly  
white in the doorway  
when he arrives home,  
stark against the glass  
panes looking into  
the hall. He walks  
inside as his father  
passes and nods.

Garret was always pale, his eyes  
sunken, so his father notices neither. He notices  
when he sees the stain on the carpet  
leading from the front door  
to the bathroom.

Garret tries to wrap duct-tape  
around the wound and pictures himself  
dying—his parents being interviewed,  
his face in the news. His father  
walks in just as they're about to begin  
the eulogy.

Garret smiles up at him.

What are you doing, Garret?  
What the fuck are you doing?

## Words Hurt

can mold  
a sociopath  
and will lead  
someone  
a decade later  
to kill

I am a psychopath

with a superiority complex

Before the year  
is over I will be  
in a place of power  
where I and I  
alone are [sic]  
judge jury and  
executioner

I will do something  
I have wanted to do  
for a while

Mom does not know about it

...

There was nothing to give  
me any confidence  
that they have the systems  
in place to keep  
a bad element  
out of the school

I think obviously  
the response was inadequate

I will not speak to any one  
individual student or employee

Period.

## Interchangeability

I am the media  
media

a construction  
not

anyone  
you would vilify

recognize yourselves

portraying Garret  
as I want you  
to see him  
and all  
Garret is

alive  
and he stands in for

once only

like the space  
between a reflection  
and the glass

I am not the

human, real, if

nobody  
is himself

irreplaceably so

**An Imperative Heralds an Accusation:**

An assumption of power balanced  
against frailty. Raise your right hand  
if you swear to tell the truth, the whole  
subjection of your youth, and nothing about  
how you were treated by authority.

Because we know. We were there with you  
and saw the videos. How cruel.

When the reporter asks you,  
*asks* you: How do you go on  
in the face of anguish?

How to respond. How to sound  
sympathetic. Or just pathetic. How  
*do* you move on? A failing  
light falls over the room.

## Fourteen Hanging Coats

Everyone around her fell  
like maroon Connecticut hills  
slipping into autumn's afternoon.

Those trees were pills  
swallowed with fresh rain  
daily for wellness

until chopped down.  
The empty forest—  
she could not stand alone.

All her friends  
lay on the ground.  
She played dead as if

the man were a bear  
and she had nowhere  
to run. Later, when Officer Penna

found her standing among  
the bodies alone and covered  
from head to toe, he didn't know

what to do any more  
than she did. They looked  
at each other. I'm scared,

she said, and I wanna go  
home. He told her to  
stay put, put on

her jacket. In the next  
room, a loud pop—

## Garret Ponders Parenthood

I often think of the fawn  
looking out from the road  
for a hole in the fence—and I recall  
it lying on the curb afterward  
identical to the time before.

I picked it up  
the small thing  
so unlike its mother  
snow and sky  
on the chest  
ears and nub  
of a tail

Its tongue fell  
to the side  
but its eyes stayed  
on mine  
stared as I  
cradled the thing  
in my arms

## **Torture Me**

in various ways.  
Make me say it:

I have nothing.

Make me say:  
I have no new information  
for you. Hold my head underwater  
and pull it back out.

Make me say something beautiful, blue  
sky stock footage released in airy  
gulps, or make me say anything  
to make you stop, release  
details elsewhere  
unfound.

Make me label  
the coats on the rack  
one by one, tag them  
and bag them.

It's all a joke.

If you release me,  
which I think you won't,  
I won't run home to my family  
or spread word of what  
you've done to me.

I will throw coins into a wishing well  
and breathe this country's dirty air  
in total relief of the absence  
of hope.

## Pseudocommando

There is no door  
to burst through  
guns blazing  
but windows  
easily break

My thick boots  
crunch glass  
and the wind  
comes in  
behind me

All sensations  
intersect  
I choose  
negation  
over confusion

I can't  
hear you  
but I know  
you can  
hear me

You don't  
want to be here?  
Well, you're here  
Look at me  
There is no door

## Impotence

I am not  
afraid but  
recently I had  
the worst nightmare  
of my life

I was walking  
past a door  
A figure  
began shaking  
it violently

I could sense  
hatred  
anger  
the worst  
possible evil

I can see  
upraised hands  
and I know  
whose they are  
but I don't understand

## **Foundations**

Destruction of a building  
is (not)  
destruction of an event  
is (not)  
destruction of loss  
is (not)  
destruction of future  
destruction

Construction of a building  
is (not)  
construction of an event  
is (not)  
construction of loss  
is (not)  
construction of future  
construction

## Conversation Between Two Ghosts

I'm still waiting for a mass shooter who eschews 9mm pistols and instead buys an AK-47 pistol, 30 30-round magazines, and 1000 hollow points....

\*\*\*

The following weapons were recovered in the course of this investigation: (1) a Bushmaster Model XM15-E2S semi-automatic rifle, found in the same classroom as the shooter's body. All of the 5.56 mm shell casings from the school that were tested were found to have been fired from this rifle. (2) a Glock 20, 10 mm semi-automatic pistol found near the shooter's body and determined to have been the source of the self-inflicted gunshot wound by which he took his own life. (3) a Sig Sauer P226, 9 mm semi-automatic pistol found on the shooter's person. There is no evidence this weapon had been fired. (4) a Izhmash Saiga-12, 12 gauge semi-automatic shotgun found in the shooter's car in the parking lot outside the school, and which was secured in the vehicle's trunk by police responding to the scene. There is no evidence this weapon had been fired. (5) a Savage Mark II rifle found at 36 Yogananda Street on the floor of the master bedroom near the bed where the body of the shooter's mother was found. This rifle also was found to have fired the four bullets recovered during the autopsy of the shooter's mother.

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How about how Mad\_Bomber has been here for three years and he *still* hasn't gone on a rampage? I thought he would've been on my catalog of mass murderers by now. ☹

\*\*\*

While the vast majority of persons interviewed had no explanation for the shooter's actions, a review of electronic evidence or digital media that appeared to belong to the shooter, revealed that the shooter had a preoccupation with mass shootings, in particular the Columbine shootings and a strong interest in firearms. For example, there was a spreadsheet with mass murders over the years listing information about each shooting.

The review of the electronic evidence also found many things that are on a typical hard drive or memory card that would probably have no relevance to the investigation either because of creation date or subject matter. That being said, the following selected topics or items were found within the digital evidence seized:

- Bookmarks pertaining to firearms, military, politics, mass murder, video games, music, books, Army Ranger, computers and programs, ammunition, candy, economic books
- Web page design folders
- Two videos showing suicide by gunshot
- Commercial movies depicting mass shootings
- The computer game titled "School Shooting" where the player controls a character who enters a school and shoots at students
- Screen shots (172) of the online game "Combat Arms"
- "Dance Dance Revolution" (DDR) game screen shots
- Videos of shooter playing DDR
- Images of the shooter holding a handgun to his head
- Images of the shooter holding a rifle to his head

- Five-second video (dramatization) depicting children being shot
- Images of shooter with a rifle, shotgun and numerous magazines in his pockets
- Documents on weapons and magazine capacity
- A document written showing the prerequisites for a mass murder spreadsheet
- A spreadsheet listing mass murders by name and information about the incident
- Materials regarding the topic of pedophilia and advocating for rights for pedophiles (not child pornography)
- Large amount of materials relating to Columbine shootings and documents on mass murders
- Large amount of materials on firearms
- Comedy videos
- Music
- Images of hamsters
- Images of Lego creations

\*\*\*\*\*

I don't like holidays, but I would say Halloween. It marks the beginning of my favorite time of the year, November-December, when the sunlight always seems to be its dimmest. Because of the snow, January and February always seem to be intolerably bright. I hate the sun so much. In any event, it's neat that Halloween is the only widely-observed holiday which sort of has the potential to be tied to despair.

\*\*\*

The shooter disliked birthdays, Christmas and holidays. He would not allow his mother to put up a Christmas tree. The mother explained it by saying that shooter had no emotions or feelings. The mother also got rid of a cat because the shooter did not want it in the house.

\*\*\*\*\*

I hate how life-apologists say (or rather, the very few of them who do anything other than mock you), "Life isn't all suffering. What about the simple pleasures, *like eating ice cream?*" They always use that example. Even if I didn't recognize the flaws in their assertion, when I think of ice cream, I can only see a repugnant lump of pus crushed out of cows' bloody nipples, who spend their entire lives confined in filth, where they're periodically raped so that they're incessantly pregnant, after which their calves are seized from them, destined to live the life of veal, with their only relief being an early death. From there, I always ride the pessimism train down different tracks until it inevitably leads me to contemplating over 500 million years of animals cannibalizing each other. Excuse me for not being thrilled by the extra jimmies on my ice cream cone.

\*\*\*

The shooter was particular about the food that he ate and its arrangement on a plate in relation to other foods on the plate. Certain types of dishware could not be used for particular foods. The mother would shop for him and cook to the shooter's specifications, though sometimes he would cook for himself. Reportedly the shooter did not drink alcohol, take drugs, prescription or otherwise, and hated the thought of doing any of those things.

\*\*\*\*\*

American mass murders were less prevalent before Richard Speck precipitated their rise in 1966. My best estimate for the absolute minimum amount of mass murders in the US since 1966 is 960. I would be surprised if there weren't a minimum of somewhere around 1500 in reality, but we'll just vaguely say that there have been over 1000. **If you were trying to measure alienation in a society, what could be a more blatant indication?** And it's glib to dismiss them as not being indicative of anything just because there have been over a thousand of them instead of over a hundred thousand, or however many you think are necessary, because mass murdering is so ridiculously over-the-top of a response that very few people are prone to do it under any circumstances. But just look at how many fans you can find for all different types of mass murderers, not just the [Columbine killers], and beyond these fans are countless more people who can sympathize with them; and beyond these are millions more who never think of relating the circumstances of their lives to anyone else but instead just go through the motions of life incessantly dissatisfied with their environment. Thinking of this society as the default state of existence is the reason why you think that humans would be "not well" for "no reason whatsoever". Civilization has not been present for 99% of the existence of hominids, and the only way that it's ever sustained is by indoctrinating each new child for years on end. The "wellness" that you speak of is solely defined by a child's submission to this process and their subsequent capacity to propagate civilization themselves. **When civilization exists in a form where all forms of alienation (among many other things) are rampant, as can be seen in the most recent incarnation within the last fifty years which AS55 talked about, new children will end up "not well" in all sorts of ways.** You don't even have to touch a topic as cryptic as mass murder to see an indication of this: you can look at a single symptom as egregious as the proliferation of antidepressants. And look in your own life. **You've said that you're afflicted by unrelenting anxiety and that you're afraid to leave your house. Do you really think that the way you feel is not symptomatic of anything other than your own inexplicable defectiveness?**

\*\*\*

Investigators then sought to determine if anyone had conspired with or aided the shooter before the shootings. To that end, investigators examined social contacts, writings, e-mails, internet blogs, telephone records and his general internet presence. One of the internet blogs on which the shooter posted focused on mass shootings and in particular the Columbine shootings. The shooter also exchanged e-mails with others who were interested in the topic of mass shootings. None of these communications, however, related to SHES or in any way suggested that the shooter intended to commit a mass shooting. Thus, the evidence as developed to date, does not demonstrate that any of those with whom he communicated conspired with the shooter or criminally aided and abetted him in committing the murders on December 14, 2012.

\*\*\*\*\*

Dead people in general receive more respect and blind compassion than they ever would have had while alive. I don't understand it.

## Letter to a Spectre

Do you remember  
that little bonfire  
before the first day  
of tenth grade?  
End of summer  
and we were burning  
every newspaper  
we could find.  
At the end  
all that was left  
was a scrap that read:  
Another loss.  
You hung it  
on your wall  
kept it there  
all that year.  
What did you do  
with it? Where  
did you leave it  
when you left?  
Did it burn  
like the scraps  
it came from?  
Is it buried  
in a notebook  
somewhere?  
I want to know  
where and why  
all things go.

**I.**  
**Mom,**

we need to talk about what I learned.  
Don't you see?  
It's a connection.  
Connections are everywhere.  
Everything is connected.

The pink flower with a black center  
and the black flower with a pink center.

**II.**  
**Dad**

is laughing on camera.  
Is he a crisis actor?  
Is that me posing  
with President Obama?  
Who am I, really?  
Who was I?

## Honesty

I wore stars in my eyes the night  
after Columbine. Counted them  
lucky who survived. Explosions  
never went off, let the many eat  
their lunches without knowledge  
of what was happening outside—

through windows, students lying  
in grass unable to move;  
a pair in black trenchcoats  
waxing philosophic approval  
like the crescent moon  
on the previous eve. Growing

up is hard to do. We don't all  
see colors in identical ways.  
His yellow is her green. Your black  
my pomegranate, seeded  
crimson and white. Sometimes  
rainbows fade to grey and the sky

scatters wavelengths not  
quite blue—dulled irreparably  
by the eyes of the viewer.

So it was that day. I lied.  
I don't remember Columbine  
happening. To my knowledge

we didn't address the event in school  
until years later. By then the assembly  
was preventive, or a way to get out

of math class. One of the relatives  
came to speak, and I might have  
cried, but I doubt it. I wept more

when the mother of a student  
killed in a drunk driving accident  
came to speak. Something about

mothers always makes me weep.

## Garret Tries To Remember the Last Time He Was Happy

but decides he can't  
recall if he ever was  
before his parents  
separated. He remembers  
playing Murder  
in the basement,  
wailing on  
his brothers and  
their friends  
in the dark,  
slamming them  
into walls  
and hitting them  
over and over.

That was fun.  
But was he  
happy? Garret  
thinks back  
to his first dog,  
Blanca. Blanca  
was old and had  
been the family  
dog for years  
before the family  
was no longer  
the family. Blanca  
stayed with his dad  
when Garret's mom  
left, or was forced  
to leave. And Garret  
remembers Killer,  
the dog they got  
after the divorce  
to try and ease  
the difficulty of  
separation. He  
remembers giving  
Killer away  
after the dog  
destroyed the carpet  
and bed. He remembers  
Kelsey, too, and giving  
her away after  
she peed on the floor  
repeatedly.  
Garret wonders  
if the cartoons  
he used to watch  
ever made him  
really laugh—

really happy;  
if football  
with his dad  
was ever more  
than—what  
it was; if  
his mother  
ever taught him  
to care for anything  
he would keep.

## **I Had an Encounter With an Angel Today**

She was walking through the aisles  
of the grocery store and carrying a stack of papers.  
My first thought was she was selling  
something, so I was  
getting ready to buy  
because that's what you do  
to help out the children.

But the papers she had  
were hearts that she had cut out.  
The little girl gave me one of the hearts,  
which had the words: "Be Kind"  
written on it. She said she was handing them out  
in honor of the children who were killed  
at Sandy Hook. I said, That's wonderful,  
I'm really glad you're doing that.  
She didn't say anything to me, but just  
smiled so sweetly, and I promised her  
that I would keep it forever.

## **Garret Communicates With the Dead in Technicolor**

I am the shirtless man  
who stares screaming  
at the wall before  
running into it.

Take to the streets!

There is blood streaming  
to my chin  
from a thousand scratches  
tittering their arachnid legs across my skin.

I can't breathe, and this air tastes like pennies.

All my friends have left me, and I am alone  
with this copper in my mouth  
and acid in my spine  
and yes I remember the blue  
semblances towering into the clouds  
from the reflecting pools

and yes I remember seeing

the shadows growing  
larger and smaller and smelling  
the fresh fur of the fawn.

**I.**  
**Rain**

Wipe the fingerprints off the murder  
weapon before you leave the scene. They don't belong  
to you—the prints. This is your way  
of saying thank you.

Later, when the hints come, feign  
ignorance of the whole situation, the well-lit  
scene inside—

They say it was full of glass, and listless  
like a window crystal refracting  
single points of light into a million  
running fragments.

**II.**  
**Bows**

are still  
in the children's hair  
and movement is a figment. Innocent  
vermillion lips twitched into static like the frayed  
signals of fiber optics. Toss a blanket  
over the remains. Mark  
the spot. Plant a seed  
in too much rain  
and it rots.

## **Garret Drives the Wrong Way Down the Road While High on PCP**

First he backs out of the driveway too quickly and hits the neighbor's mailbox across the street. He makes sure to run over the curb and roll through the stop sign leading onto the highway. His friend in the passenger seat hands him a bottle of Absinthe, their second in the past twenty-four hours, but it's the cocaine that keeps them going, rolling underneath their sick cocktail and keeping them afloat like bodies on a wave. Garret mentions how much he feels like he is underwater, how he constantly feels he is under water. He screams out the window at a passing car going in the opposite direction that what has been lost will never be replaced. The car honks its horn and swerves out of the way.

His friend laughs and laughs. Garret loves him for this and wishes he would keep laughing. Garret makes noises with his mouth and hopes nobody notices the difference. He can't remember the last time he really laughed. Sometimes he thinks he lacks a certain chemical in the brain, that his mistakes can all be explained by science. But this doesn't take his own free will into account. Garret is all about free will. He tells his friend this as he barrels toward a wall of cars stopped and staring at him across a lighted intersection.

He slams his hands on the steering wheel and turns.

## **An Image**

we cling to  
all that's left  
or (n)ever was  
it's systemic  
imagine:

a bird  
singing  
in the cleft  
of a tree

a flower  
opening

a series  
of coats

two blue pillars  
against the night sky

imagine:

playing peekaboo  
for your fucking life

hiding underneath  
a schooldesk

glass doorways  
shattered

a man  
entering

pictures  
that can't  
be found

**I.**  
**Firstborn**

Night fell over  
the galaxy  
like a shroud  
covering the blind  
eyes of a prophet.

Days broke  
endlessly  
in the periphery—  
distance  
deafening

lightspeed  
to a crawl—  
the shawl stretching  
to fibers. Only specks  
shone through

spreading there  
little warmth  
into the arms  
of cold bodies  
orbiting nothing

in what was not  
yet a spiral.  
Far-off Andromeda  
basked in its suns  
many and beautiful

each with its own  
autonomous dust  
distanced by the deafening  
vacuum of space.  
And our world

was not yet. Everywhere  
the darkness held  
its breath, waiting  
for light to break  
or for the prophet to speak

into existence  
a child  
who would warm  
the vastness  
inside us all.

## II. Yehi'Or

Billions upon billions of suns  
exploded into existence  
and around one  
a solar system grew  
that contained a rock  
that would come to be known  
as Earth.

This is not a creation story.

Light seeped in to the edges  
of our lonely corridor of space  
long before man or woman  
was able to conceptualize  
god or light. And it was quick  
like the bolt of a gun  
emptying spent rounds.

And nobody said, *fiat lux*,

let light be made  
or let there be light  
for light always was  
and always will be  
despite our ability  
to observe it or not.  
See

the indifferent universe

not eyeing anything  
in our terms—its suns  
multiplied and spread  
further and further  
apart—the fibers  
split

to their limits—split again.

The universe is always  
expanding. Or is it  
collapsing? The two  
feel so much the same  
when in all directions  
darkness looms  
and light must be kept

at a distance.

## Memorial

*We left space for an open field where the grass could grow and the sun could shine*

He stole the signs

(because the children whose memorial funds were advertised  
did not die at Sandy Hook. They never existed to begin with. Make the call)  
[Illuminati bourgeoisie one percent gun control police state]

They demolished the schools

(but this isn't about protecting kids. This is about the surviving  
Republicans trying to erase the memory of what their fellow Republicans did)  
[left-wing right-wing fascist socialist liberal conservative media bullshit]

We repurposed the materials

(to be made into a plaque commemorating the victims; in another case no one was allowed  
to take any materials—including items like brick, glass, and doorknobs)  
[non-disclosure agreements no crime scene no evidence sustainability]

We dedicate these memorials

(to the brave women and children, to the noble heroes, to the martyrs, to those who lost  
their lives, to America, to freedom, to innocence, to the victims)  
[towering celebrities citizens aliens patriotism nationalism fanaticism]

*The building's redesign includes soothing new paint colors—daffodil  
yellow, freshwater blue, parakeet apple green. There is a new cafeteria and visitor's center  
near a Starbuck's kiosk. Soundproof glass walls enclose a former atrium to help reduce noise.*

## **Garret Loves the Fresh Cost of Progress**

the price of headstones  
set in dead-cut grass  
licked with footprints, ghosts  
left in a graveyard  
already teeming.

Here lies: the seeming  
remnants of ones once loved; stains  
of acid rain on stone; prolapsed hunger,  
thirst. Here lies beloved, cherished, devoted, honored,  
distended, upended, disgraced, forgotten. Here lies  
horror. Innocence. Relevance to daily life. Lives.  
Tend to flowers at the graves, though  
they will never be all that's left.

## **In Hopelessness, Hope**

Birds still yearn in the same shrill calls  
as the sun lines the sky with all colors, and seas  
lap waves endlessly against the moon's ghost  
light, broken only by night's fall  
gracing sleepless worlds with its presence.

And the waves sound  
like cannons, rifles plodding  
in regular tones, sure  
as time's passing rounds  
against the shore, or two planes

in the morning spilling pillars of stone.  
Stock images disrupted by corruption  
eating out metal with fuel and fire  
in the same way a child bleeds dry  
a cookie jar and then asks for more.

The cries sound like birds  
whistling in swan- or swallow-dives  
weaving down to cold grounds. Quickly,  
quickly, onlookers hold out flowers  
for far-gone innocence, for lives

cut marginally shorter (in the grand  
scheme of things) by a tower shooting  
out rock and debris, by a boy fallen from—  
but we are all parentless children  
sowing our seeds in saturated dirt.

Disrupted by beauty, ideas,  
love, light, hope, and people,  
people do terrible things.  
We sensationalize, focus  
on these. This is the only way

we can grasp moments fleeting, good.

## **Biography**

Anthony E. Mucciarone received his Bachelor of Arts in English from George Mason University in 2012. His concentration for this degree was creative writing. After taking a semester off, he began pursuing his Master of Fine Arts in poetry from George Mason University, where he was also awarded a position as a teaching assistant.