


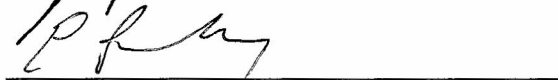
VARIABLE STARS

by

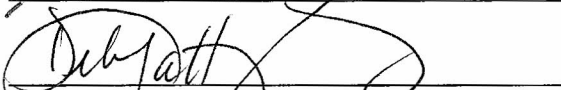
Sarah Ann Winn
A Thesis
Submitted to the
Graduate Faculty
of
George Mason University
in Partial Fulfillment of
The Requirements for the Degree
of
Master of Fine Arts
Creative Writing

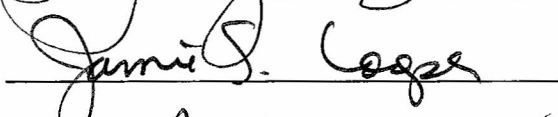
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Date: April 25, 2014 Spring Semester 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

Variable Stars

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 2014
George Mason University
Fairfax, VA

DEDICATION

For my family, and for those who have become my family.

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Apeiron Review: "My 95"

Avatar Review: "Falls"

Flycatcher: "Alma"

Great Weather for Media: "Appendix C," "Appendix D," "Appendix E"

Iceflow.com/riverbabble: "Skyless"

Ishaan Literary Review: "Deconstructed," "Earthenware"

Lunchticket.org: "Our Lady of the Highways"

Nassau Review: "Variable Stars"

San Pedro River Review: "Floats"

Trickster: "Appendix A," "Appendix B"

Two Thirds North: "Toad Cactus"

Vector Press: "Baldwin Apples"

1110: "Appendix F," "Appendix G"

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	ix
Appendix A.....	3
How to Fold a Dream.....	4
Variable Stars.....	5
Homing.....	6
Baldwin Apples.....	7
Alma.....	8
Coventry.....	10
The Horsehead Nebula.....	11
Our Lady of the Highways.....	12
Appendix B.....	13
From the Wind-Up Cathedral.....	14
Ex Votos Tag Sale.....	15
The Museumobile.....	16
Lunar Distances.....	18
My 95.....	19
Ode to the Pull-off on I-95 between Havre de Grace and Exit 4B.....	20
The Third Eyelid of the Dog.....	21
Grieving the Eclipse.....	22
Appendix C.....	23
Seascape.....	24
Bow Wave.....	25
Elizabeth Bishop's Collie.....	26
Undertow.....	27
Skyless.....	29
Falls.....	30

Out.....	31
The Cave	32
Nocturne.....	33
Appendix D.....	34
Braeburn Apple.....	35
Dock.....	36
Crab Apples	37
I Consider Whether Shipping Your Memory Home Would Be Too Costly.....	38
Earthenware	39
41 Charles Street.....	40
Toad Cactus	41
For a Lighter Spring Carryon.....	42
Deconstructed	43
Fire Place	44
Appendix E	45
Appendix F.....	46
Floats.....	47
Attendant.....	49
To(to)	50
Dried Poppy	51
Dorothy Thinks of Oz, the Great and Powerful, at Christmas.....	52
From the Scaffold	53
Sketching from Life	54
Appendix G.....	55
Appendix H.....	56
Notes	57

ABSTRACT

VARIABLE STARS

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George Mason University, 2014

Thesis Director: Jennifer Atkinson

Like a constellation of variable stars, these poems grow brighter and darker, depending on their proximity to loss. Throughout, the poems grapple with various kinds of losses, and attempt to find solace and half-answers in likely and unlikely places, including the natural world. In curating a collection of items through a series of Appendices, the poems look for a place for the things which cannot be held, but which anyone who has experienced a loss would want to retain.

Variable stars are stars that change brightness. The brightness changes of these stars can range from a thousandth of a magnitude to as much as twenty magnitudes over periods of a fraction of a second to years, depending on the type of variable star. Over 150,000 variable stars are known and catalogued, and many thousands more are suspected to be variable.

There are a number of reasons why variable stars change their brightness. Pulsating variables, for example, swell and shrink due to internal forces. An eclipsing binary will dim when it is eclipsed by a faint companion, and then brighten when the occulting star moves out of the way. Some variable stars are actually extremely close pairs of stars, exchanging mass as one star strips the atmosphere from the other.

“Variable Stars - What Are They and Why Observe Them?”
American Association of Variable Star Observers

The real friends of the space voyager are the stars. Their friendly, familiar patterns are constant companions, unchanging, out there.

— James Lovell, Apollo Astronaut

The night is even more richly colored than the day. . . . If only one pays attention to it, one sees that certain stars are citron yellow, while others have a pink glow or a green, blue and forget-me-not brilliance. And without my expiating on this theme, it should be clear that putting little white dots on a blue-black surface is not enough.

— Vincent van Gogh

APPENDIX A

Fig. 118: Photograph, hand-tinted black and white. Five women standing in front of a small, white house. Handwritten note on reverse reads, “Denise, Loretta, Peggy, Helen, Joyce, Thelma Newberry, not pictured.” The word “not” has been scribbled over.

Fig. 130: Map c. 20—, with scattered handwritten notes along Route 50. Legend includes symbols for dilapidated barn, used bookstores, and yard sales.

Fig. 137: Scrap of blue felt, cut in the shape of a rabbit. Stitched in silver are the words “Bye Bye Blackbird!” A black iron-on silhouette of a bird pecks at the punctuation.

HOW TO FOLD A DREAM

You have to think first of the breakables.
The four mockingbirds growing smaller
on receding fence posts
must be stacked one inside the other
like nesting dolls. Wrap their song in a cyan silk scarf.
Place it in the smallest.
It must be tucked in carefully.

Take down Venus.
Pack it separately—it's wish-laden, fragile.
Store the thunder in your laughter,
and eat the sunset while it's still ripe.

Fold the juniper-freckled fields
in the velvet peridot your grandmother
draped over her couch.
Later, you can follow the creases like a map,
riverbeds readable as
the lines in your palm.

Rearrange the constellations.
Move Orion closer to Diana.
Locked in a hunter's embrace,
each will keep forever in the Gulf Stream,
their reflection moving on the water
like a skiff made of stars.

Don't surrender that last kiss to waking.
Drop it in your pocket.
Take it out when people aren't watching.
Admire its crimson petals,
the thrilling yellow-jacket bump of desire.

VARIABLE STARS

Constellations can't depend
on their variable stars,
which fade and flare as if some
cosmic light bill has been left
unpaid or some fierce storm forced
the stars to sit in the dark
a while while the oak of another galaxy
is downed, and myths must shift.

Maybe Orion, cleaning
a rabbit fresh from hunt, dripped
blood onto his lap, splashed bright
nebulae, or maybe
Demeter shorted circuits,
grieving after Orion fell
to the scorpion sting.

Maybe when Vincent painted,
fifteen jolted as he looked
up, stuttered into brightness
all at once, just for that moment.
Someone should warn pilots,
Don't seek the stars for guidance;
Starry Night is not a map.

Astronomers know some paths
never re-cross, study whole
skies of starry impermanence.
We, too, shimmer and flare, paired,
eclipsing, splitting, hiding
behind yawning skies. Darkness dilates
but never swallows us whole.

HOMING

She thinks the homing doves are pigeons, their white
more shocking than a camera flash, a spark
against the sky, reminder of the sun on lakes.

Unlikely they would roost here, on break
from rising up at weddings.
Black rooftop, white rhythm.

Nearby, a hedge obscures the dovecote
from the roadside view. Beside the funeral home,
up on power lines, above the dead who come and go.

Where traffic pauses at the light,
the living haunt the dead.
She thinks of home when driving to Ohio.

She thinks of her late mother's step, her ghost climbing
through her childhood, slippers flopping up the stairs.
If she is sleeping, I will wake her. Always

the pause where the stairs flattened in a mesa
beside my door. The sleeper waits to say, "Goodnight,"
and doves rise past like dreams.

When she drives by, their wings call soft
her mother's name, unless the drive is dark
and she's asleep and dreaming.

BALDWIN APPLES

In October, their vinegar
drew bees or decay's sweetening
drew bees. We brought bushel baskets
and sorted. Some for the compost,
the gently bruised for pies. The best,
those half-gone with pocked, perfect skin
still a little green, for canning
and apple butter. The Baldwins
lured me to the kitchen counter.
The turn-and-scraping colander
mill when the cooked apples were poured in—
the splashed juice hot and delicious.
Space made by adding cooked apples
carefully. She tipped the ancient
dutch oven, and my idea
of plenty poured down. *Did you and she—*
I asked. *Hush*, she answered. I didn't dare
move or some would go to waste.
Save some for later, she said. Now
we restock the canned goods cupboard.
No beauty goes to waste here. Fill
the shelf. Put up for lean winter
the sweet of slowly-gathering
afternoon, that long fragrant bake,
the whole house cooked up and browned with
cinnamon. In winter, the sound
of that seal breaking snaps me back
to sorting apples in the sun.
Their scent rolled from Atalanta's
fingers, the breath of Eve before she bit.

ALMA

Nourished in Latin, Spanish for *soul*,
in Arabic, *on the water*.
I translated the Buckeye blossoms spelling
directions on the street, words
in a language only I knew,
a secret message between me and the trees—
their scent as I walked up Alma Avenue
everywhere. As they blew past, I heard the
Hungarian meaning—*apple*.

I was measured against the hunchback Baldwin tree,
nourished by the rain returning to the lakes in showers, in drizzles.
Cut out, a piece of the moon, jigsawed with maple branches.

Gorge of girl, shaped by erosion,
gorgeous, engorged by trees,
pitted by tart cherries giving over to sweetness,
transformed by weeds turned into dandelion salad,
shored up by life on lakes which were named for carrying.
I was made to portage, by Portage—a girl raised by reservoirs,
lifted from one lake and carried to the next,
made to find joy in journeys.

Taught this Alma, Aramaic, my *world*
begins in in-between; I
learned to read words scrawled on screen doors
as cuneiform, rain-worn. I traced
petrichor to its origin—our vestibule.
Ran down the worn desire paths,
followed creases made by ironing day,
the smell of steam and hot cotton.
I entered the square stacks
of handkerchiefs in dresser drawers,
folded, pressed, intent.

I sorted the wheat pennies from copper chaff

kept in a wooden bowl. I counted.
The number of pennies—
how far from Alma I still must go.

COVENTRY

How we drove down the highway, past the clock tower: I showed you my wave as we passed the old Firestone building. How the turnoff came so quickly.

How the owls stood in the window of the Old Portage Inn as a signal or a code. I noticed every week and wondered what they were meant to ward away, especially in winter when the crowds came to watch ice golf. Grandma and Grandpa would not guess. How we found out the owls and the innkeepers were arrested, at last, and how I missed the owls, miss them even now.

How the sign crossing the bridge showed a mother duck with her head cut off, blithely (or was it bravely?) leading three little ones across. How the island grew up from the lake the year they dredged, the year Jimmy died.

Here is the place, with its magic shop thrifts and its lake-skirting roads. How Susan lived just across the way and around the point, though you could not see her house from my room; how her house was hidden even from a boat at her shore. Here are the woods we stumbled through at night. Here is the church, here is the church bell, open the doors, see all the missing people.

How small this room is, how the beds twin and face the wrong way, how the past jigsaws in. How the leaves cast the shadow of an old woman in a rocker, how the headlights chase across the ceiling. See the chestnut mare's eye in the pine wall, and just below it, the roan's.

THE HORSEHEAD NEBULA

She labors alone.
Her end endears her to the hours.

The horses near her, then run on
as one, abalone-dense.

She's lush and adorned.
She bends to double her burden
and unleashes the hounds.

She tends the star stable,
shoes the red suns,

brushes the solar blue,
barely there, then the roan.

OUR LADY OF THE HIGHWAYS

Find, if you can, the brightest stars—
her right shoulder, the toe of her sandaled left foot,
one for each of her hips.
Her halo has gone out. Stars flicker on and off
from her lifted wrist, her right hand raised,

index finger linked with thumb,
blessing the shining northbound lane.
How exhausting to be collimated,
intended for eternity.
She does not disperse.

I wish on slow nights
she could extend her arm,
hitch a ride north
to the Waffle House, where syrup flows
for twenty four hours without stopping.

Give her a smaller miracle, lacking
loaves and fishes. Lacking a wedding without wine.
Let her heal the pothole just before the bridge.
She's stranded in a field on a hill,
waiting for the moon to make

the cars into parallel arcs, star paths,
riding a silver-scratched record.
A turntable made out of the earth,
and she's in the center,
unturning, unwavering.

APPENDIX B

Fig. 182: Framed black-and-white photograph of a woman wearing sunglasses on a small sailboat, c. 19—, a small, attentive dog at her feet.

Fig. 225: Red leather journal, lined and unlined. Water-damaged pages make the ink illegible, but the drawings are mostly intact.

Fig. 227: 5x7 manila envelope, acid-proof. Contents: Smell of clothes dried on a line, their shadows moving in the sun—waving arms and flipping up skirts.

Fig. 230: Newspaper clipping, *City Paper*, March 12, 20—. “Melt Causes Flooding at Texas Falls.” The words *winter*, *century*, *weddings*, *blanketed* are circled in blue ink.

FROM THE WIND-UP CATHEDRAL

The doors of the triptych open, and from the darkness
a little priest with a face like a hewn saint wheels forward.

Up goes a little copper-plated book, down and up.
A tin hymn struck out on music box gears.

Half panes in the rose window angle on a pin;
shimmering, glass palm branches, shimmering resurrection story.

As one piece, the congregation stutters, then nods.

The little priest lifts his arms;
the congregation lifts their heads and stands.

Mouths fall open, lined with gold
Glorianas. Nearby, toys peer in.

No room, they mourn, pray clumsy prayers.
If anyone could understand ungainly donkey rides

and being turned away, they would.

EX VOTOS TAG SALE

Volunteers put the button boxes
beside the purses,
check every pocket for change,
mate clip-on earrings.

They pose mannequins, bottle-cap encrusted,
by a tangled bra collection,
a whirligig built from painted popsicle sticks
too tall and rickety to get indoors,

glittering medallions, stand-ins
for wishes fulfilled,
Boy Scout achievement badges,
piles of polyester suit jackets,

unstrung fence of cane handles,
wall of leaning crutches arranged
like artful bones in catacombs—
exactly three hundred, though not all paired.

She'll tell anyone who'll listen,
That was my silver heart, inscribed with a prayer to St. Anthony.
I polished it every year.

THE MUSEUMOBILE

of Moveable History
is missing again.
Lost traveling out to towns
too remote to hear about
the endless lost things—
cities buried while

we did laundry, washed
away while we scrubbed
floors; safe planes unsafening;
sudden mountains opening
like pop-ups in children's books;
cave paintings found by children

in Pied Piper range, in stories
no longer legend, languages
fading or stolen away.
Last Titanic survivor
and oldest known test patient
for polio vaccine

get a divorce.
How dangerous it all is.
We know so much history,
so little about the past.
Thirty miners still buried,
as deep as they ever were.

One hundred years ago,
the mathematic equivalent of
once upon, they understood—
the way through history
is soundproof. Must be
tube threaded carefully.

The same stints used to keep my

Grandmother's arteries open
prop these lines of story,
which flow, for now. Always
down deep in the dark: the fear
something new will collapse.

LUNAR DISTANCES

If I measure, stretching yarn,
the distance between each
family grave, marking in star trails
the relationships among my personal legends,

and if I recognize the role of the rain,
re-learn the song of the yellow finch,
recognize hymns, too, could be paths,
quilts, and tire tracks dug into a yard.

If I follow to the root
our family, the Baldwin's crooked branches,
will it end deep in Heaven, or on South Main
at the Haven of Rest Home for the Indigent?

MY 95

I've sewn a running stitch back and forth,
reinforced with years, made a sleeve of back ways.

You promise speed—give
with one hand and take back with the other.
Ticket cameras, barriers propped
up stopping jumpers, preventing the view.

I used to be able to see the Susquehanna
before the bridge sides hunched, cement shrug.
I used to count barrels left 'til I reached Delaware;
the orange breadcrumb trail led me north.

I matched the song of my speed
to the passing of dotted lines.
I'm pretty sure they're painted in 4/4.

I'd rip along your seam,
eat you like gingerbread,
you snow-dusted treat, you irregular bolt of grey.

I'd see the sign for the Havre de Grace decoy museum,
a stand-in for the actual, or a museum full of art intended to deceive.
I don't stop, just in case.

ODE TO THE PULL-OFF ON I-95 BETWEEN HAVRE DE GRACE AND EXIT 4B

I think I am in love with you,
you slender haven,
you shady, unbarreled reprieve
from orange blinking lights.

You draw me in to your white-lined embrace,
your backyard picnic table.
You comfort me in traffic
with your slight lean to the right.

Under construction, 95 is a sleek eel,
menacing and shoulderless,
skin flecked with wrecks and bottlenecks,
glassy-eyed on a north-south current.

I rejoice in your lack of ditch, your ease.
You envelop me—I walk the dog while
you mimic park birdcalls.

If the other drivers should glance over,
see us dallying here, let them look.
We are a blur of grace proven greenly.

THE THIRD EYELID OF THE DOG

Called the *haw*,
double protector of the eye.
A way to clear without crying,
as dogs were not granted tears,
lest they never stop.

The endless partings, the hikers
lost in the national forest, latent
heart disease, and disappearing bees,
the lonely, long hours spent worrying
about global warming
and the mysterious noises downstairs,
and then, at last, the return.

To suffer that wild uprising
without vent. The unbearable, leaping heart.

GRIEVING THE ECLIPSE

I'll never hear from you again,
never find an envelope
whose letter always says the same things
in different ways, year after year.

I used to laugh at how you talked about the weather,
how I could have known already
by watching the forecast what you would say.
Never knew to look in the spaces between the words

to find unwritten news about stars within stars
gone out over the water, flickering,
and more: verses, the way you said God spoke
when you held a shell up to my ear.

I didn't hear anything but knew what I was meant to say.
How I should describe the watch's writhing gears,
the time doled out and contained. In the beginning
was the end, and the end knew you and the end was you.

How I should wrap my wrist, let the band
wear me down, leave its mark.
When it's time to go in, you said, *tell me,*
but I missed it. This is what keeps me from sleep,

just in case anything else happens
while I find a scrap of peace, a shadow cast on the snow.
The darkness tells me the body is only an excuse:
something to contain the soul, now swaying in the tree,

the sky between the branches, waving in the wind.
There is nothing left but to try to keep imperfect time
and watch everything in creation, the fragments
of words reaching out past leaves to us.

APPENDIX C

Fig. 233: .mp3 sound file. Recorded 10/17/20—. A woman hums a lullaby; the noise of occasional traffic intervenes. A siren. A bird, concerned for its young, repeats its song.

Fig. 239: Pencil sketch. *Spigelia Popovkin*, pinkroot, which stretches to the ground when it blossoms to bury its own seeds in the earth.

Fig. 260: Three-dimensional paper figure, insert. When the book opens, the origami rises into concentric folds of mother and child. Artist unknown.

SEASCAPE

This stretch of dunes has no path.
The houses turn their backs.
Only the church presents its door,
ready to spill parishioners out to sea.

Two empty boats drift, tentative.
Neither bow faces the empty shore.
Nobody looks for them.
No nearby fisherman stands,
waders in hand, bewildered.

The skiff with cracked lavender paint remembers
the children leaned half out, hands stretched towards
the shore. Only the boats, empty of passengers,
notice all dangers past.

BOW WAVE

Transplanted fan, a breeze comes at will.
We float inside four distinct, yellow skies
with an aquarium rigged for a portal.

Paperwhites for our bon voyage.
In winter, evergreens. Parcels neatly addressed,
ready for the post office, whenever we pull into port.

On a hinge, we may list for a week to the east,
then to the west. Whenever I call for them,
storms arrive. Room service.

Little clever captain, you tip the floor uneven.
Perhaps the boat will startle a bird and the shore
will rise on the horizon, a jagged distant green.

When there's an orange on the pillow,
we can think of home and sigh,
but only for a moment.

ELIZABETH BISHOP'S COLLIE

Elegant in his taupe faux-fur ruff, he probably already knows which fork to use at a dinner party. When a fork is not required, he may delicately eviscerate a whole barbecue chicken with his spotless paws, or he may retire with apologies, tail low.

He is an amateur collector of netsuke, preferring the ones shaped like animals. Something pleases him about the way their eyes seem to follow him. He enjoys knowing they have secrets to guard. He would like to find rare scrimshaw, old castings of bones and fossils to display in a case he has made using an oil can, some fern fiddleheads, and eleven pristine snail shells.

He is acquainted with travel, how everything smells wrong at first. How no amount of turning settles you in for sleep. His well-behaved mane settles on his shoulders as he watches the girl's bus pull away. His eyes, twin darknesses. He whines. His long muzzle aims into the wind, waiting for a signal to move. He has unfinished business with bones.

UNDERTOW

The ocean draws water
through perforated shell;
finds the ways of breath,
imagined aeration
as intention; winnows
a hard, unwilling lung,
a shell roaming restless,
struggling from surf, submerged,
salt flat to sand bar,
jetty to shelf.

Another shell, at first
a haven, a tower,
a many windowed room,
a water-worn staircase,
a last path for the sea,
pacing up and down,
wringing her hands.
A columna time carved.

A whelk, a history
built in outpourings.
the edge expands, me-shaped.
A slip shows, a little
further each time. If I
outgrow it, it cannot
grow. I worry: When does
the new wearing begin?

Another, a long skein
of dried pods, another,
a pale sand dollar,
another and another.
The beach, the body
of the ocean. The waves,
proof the ocean's mind can change,

proof her nature cannot.

SKYLESS

When the sky closes up shop and hangs out the sign, all the other planets turn their heads. They wonder how we get by without any sky. They pity our poverty, the way the color blue no longer belongs to us. How we lose the warm night smell of honeysuckle. When the sky closes, drapes covers over its counters, and sets the alarm, when the clouds are dim and protected, when only the passing headlights glint against the stars, we find the world without atmosphere is black or white. We blame ourselves, but there is nobody to punish us, only our own shadows.

FALLS

When the high water from the storm receded, much of the path went with it. The recent rain rounded out hollows under the tree roots, poking up out of the ground, and washed out the rocks in the path. The flood rushed away as fast as it came, so that the mud splashed everything low with brown spray-painted droplets. At the bottom of the falls, where the boulders crowd close to the mist, I braced my legs against one rock and my back against another. I pushed hard with my legs until the earth opened up wide and deep. With a satisfying crack, the raw roots of trees jagged the earth, and everything eroded faster. Little bits of earth muddied the water. The earth's seam split straight up the sky's back. Away crumbled the river edge. Lines of water and sky and water and earth blurred until there was only the path and the water. The river grew darker and darker. I traced it down the washed-out and still-soggy towpath, pushing through the underbrush. As I walked, the water turned from tea-colored to blue then bluer then black, and black, and blacker 'til the night sky was rushing past under the trees. Stars caught in the torrent washed along. The Pleiades snagged on a tree hanging out low, nearly toppling it into the river. The star pileup made it difficult to hear anything else, with its hissing and singing out loudly for freedom. All at once, the sound dislodged the tangle, and after a few spins, down the river the constellation went. I walked for hours, until the sky stopped flowing by, the mud dried up, and the pattern made by the fish in the mud spelled out my name. I retraced my steps. The moon was caught in the fissure, blocking the falls except for a few small slivers of sky dripping down in a trickle. My dog barked at the moon once, then began to howl, and with each howl he nudged the moon with his nose. I told him to stop howling at the moon and to find his ball. He found it and we went home.

OUT

Running out of gas in West Virginia at midnight feels like an act of God. No use to start walking now. Nothing is open. The waterfall is somewhere nearby, but unlit by the new moon; we could only get close enough to fall in and still see nothing but the wet dark. The only light comes from the mining spotlights, which glare out of the hills. Shadowy carts on an apparatus rigged like a Ferris wheel haul dark earth out of the earth. Think about those men under ground. They're as stuck as we are, and even once they're out, may never get out.

THE CAVE

Rumors say the cave's so deep
everyone has given up
hope of reaching the bottom.
Men once unbouldered narrow
halls, clawed through to every
mystery aching arms could
reach. The cave refused to yield.
Sometimes they still flicker, shine
lights, send down sound. The cave keeps
them, returns copies of sounds,
keeps the original, keeps
to itself. They could not get
at its center. Far below,
a river flows, unserene.
Phosphorescence lines unseen
lake shores. It greens the blind white
salamanders while the cave
offers only rock, rocking.
An empty quartz cradle.

NOCTURNE

Our little one runs around the sky without thought of finding a friend. Typical of only children, she does not always play well with others. We've thought of having a second, but the time never seemed right, and also, who would want another, having already our bright girl. We enroll her in the best school. For her afternoons, piano and ballet. Our house is full of pirouettes and inside-out tights, curled like spent flower blossoms left on the stairs. She speaks all the languages of the earth. She knows how to roll her r's. She knows every constellation. She thinks she might one day grow up to be a painter. We give her lakes full of rippling shadows and light, and all the walls she can cover. She begs us for a kitten. We give her a kitten. She calls me mother, and when I turn out the light she buries her head in my neck. Her sleeplessness worries us. We have asked for tests to cover a range of childhood ailments. We could not bear to lose her.

APPENDIX D

Fig. 485: A curved line in the bumpy ice, drawn by the blade of a white figure skate.

Fig. 596: Mobile made of string, paper, wood. Five Viking ships drift in circles overhead. The fifth, larger than all the others, has no dragon helm, has a long pointed form, possibly that of a loon angling up and away.

BRAEBURN APPLE

In the end, she was little more than a bundle of worn
stakes left in the orchard. Still, her heart worked
to keep the secret star of seeds inside shining.

The day we saw the deer, we shared a two-fisted apple.
No matter how much I try to hear, in my sister's voice,
exactly what she said, only the knobby shape of the apple is clear.

I don't remember whether she said anything at all
as they bounded away, or if she only laughed and ate the core.
The stubborn apple blocks my way into the past,

sour, oversized and imperfect,
too hard, lip-bruising. She might not have laughed,
but as she was always laughing, it's likely.

DOCK

Breakers slap
the warped pine,
Swift-tied knots
persistent pressure,
Winter will press
against the portholes,
will imagine astrolabe
Take in your towlines,
bottom boats on their sides

the boards, blacken
painted pre-war.
tighten and swell,
imperfect rest.
its white forehead
will trace the wood grain,
and Gulf Streams stowed below.
stack your turquoise
slick with pitch and sun.

CRAB APPLES

Almost to make up in plenty for their size and sour,
the little green apples grow tight-clustered blossoms.

They come to me in dreams. "Pick one," I'm told.
Grown angry and prolific, the faces from the boughs

scrunch at my sour-apple audacity. I lift my hand
and see the cougar bounding down, beatific.

I am twice glad to have swerved and laughed,
seeing and missing.

I CONSIDER WHETHER SHIPPING YOUR MEMORY HOME WOULD BE TOO COSTLY

I take your memory out to the garage
to weigh it. The scale for this is ageless and large,
speaks of counters and bulk foods.
Its shadow has stood for years, swaying,
red needle uncertainly bouncing when jostled.

A hidden spring reveals a drawer underneath,
with a little set of weights in various shapes.
One, cast in lead, a net of light on water;
another, a set of music box gears
all in bronze, each the weight of a different song,

sawtoothed as if meant for toy lumber mills.
I place your memory on the cradle, light as light,
which also has the weight and substance of matter,
add twenty snowflakes and one spiced pear from last Fall's preserves.
I tap the meter, which trembles, add a slice of lemon

from a cold tea cup, sing as much as I can remember
from *When the Roll is Called up Yonder*. Finally,
I open your last letter, lift off the handwriting, unbend
each word, straighten the ink into a binary barcode of blue,
dole these sticks to the tray. If it balances, you'll go.

EARTHENWARE

Broken things fill in cracks.
My grandma's vase,
long ago tipped by the cat,
the pieces of blue pottery
not thrown out.

One of the beautiful blue pieces
cut my thumb; the sharps worth saving,
now in a bowl on the mantle.
The glue on this workbench
puddles, then dries.

Underground some assemblage moves,
the calculation of seeds in frozen ground
already pulling the black coats from their shoulders.

41 CHARLES STREET

Holding grandmother's hand—
a limp lettuce leaf, a pale
used up daffodil—
all the way to school,

the houses like Roman numerals.
The prim ocean's tidy tides,
the neat lapping
that never dared swell

over a ship in harbor.
The grownups may have known
but never told the dangers
below the surface or out to sea.

The house next door
pulled apart by ivy, obscured by ivy.
The stoop defeats the ivy,
rises and questions.

The door disapproves.
How long will the stairs grovel
at the feet of the insipid house?
No one is at home.

Without occupants to twitch
a curtain or answer a knock.
These natives. These never wilds.
Our attics adjoin; we never meet.

TOAD CACTUS

Put it on paper;
extract it gingerly from the scene,
away from opalized emerald flies
clustering on the bloom, after
the specked lurid dots, citrine and rot.
Saddle-stitched red, its edges
creep inwards, round out,
atrophy in limpid peels.

My aunt fished her purse for coral lipstick,
lined her lips after every doctor filed through.
Later, her passive hands opened like petals
and would not accept offers,
then squeezed and would not let go.

The flower is reluctant to release its name.
Let everything wither at last, even that.
Let the artist, the botanist, the child
remember the blood drops on the star; let them
forget. Allow for impostors among constellations,
all benign, all shining.

FOR A LIGHTER SPRING CARRYON

You won't have room for every leafless tree.
One may represent all, especially if you
shake it like an umbrella
to lessen moisture before closing.

Don't bother with the woolly mantle of snow.
Think layers. Dustings in varying thicknesses
will allow you flexibility.
Rolling conserves space, prevents wrinkles.

Turn inwards the lean rows between apple trees, taking care
not to crease any paw prints or snag on wayward twigs.
A countertop sealer preserves freshness, but also
is ideal for traveling light. Begin with a corner

of the Gemonid shower. Its vacuum flattens
away excessive city glare. The stars
will be bright smears, flat and easy to pack.
Ready for use when you or Demeter appears
over the horizon, ready to find place in your new sky.

Pair slushy-shoe puddles after they ice over,
then turn them to face each other. Stow them
in a drawstring bag made from the waterproof new moon.
This will protect the hibernating chipmunks and squirrels
until you disembark, until you find in your new place a home.

DECONSTRUCTED

Drop of red wine
slides down the tablecloth—
her first sip ruined,
spilled, seventy years ago.

A red sweater unravels—
pull the thread, the sleeve
uncouples into a fray.

Line of cigarette smoke
from his goodbye—
dropped and heel-ground.

How precise the cut.
She remembers the pattern
of the lace curtain
on her grandmother's back door,
but cannot describe it.

Memories skid
on a slick table,
a new deck of cards shuffled,
dropped, hard to pick up
with shaking hands.

FIRE PLACE

The old year
burnt out in
snaps of wood-
sap, pop and
knot flare blue.
I left space
in the stack
so air could
flame, piled logs
unevenly so
they would fall
at odd times,
displaced. Found
small splinters
in my hands,
the last still-
dangerous,
broken pieces.
Sudden stack
shift; logs roll.
Bright scatter
and sudden
blow forward.
Now, all around
the embers,
the ash.

APPENDIX E

Fig. 600: Audio cassette, unraveled in curls and tangles. Rewound, a woman's voice whispers the same five words again and again. *Promise me you won't forget.*

Fig. 611: Bolt of grey cloth, folded into a neat square about one meter by one meter. Opened and laid nearly flat, a glittering lake too large to shout across, said to be bottomless.

APPENDIX F

Fig. 800: Men's shaving kit containing a bottle of *Old Spice*, 6 oz., mostly full, a weighty electric razor, and a half-used tube of Chapstick, still imprinted with the shape of its owner's lips. The case is monogrammed with the letters JHP, stitched in precise red thread.

Fig. 802: A silkscreen of a pond skater moving across the water's surface, a fish's mouth approaching at an angle, printed in delicate lines on a dusk-colored t-shirt.

Fig. 810: Twelve handcrafted wooden rowboats, circa 19—. Three neat rows rest on the grass beside the docks, oarlocks empty, oars at rest in the boathouse.

FLOATS

July Fourth. Baseball's on the radio;
a steady hum from the garage
outlasts the locusts for an inning.

Tonight the fireworks will
splay and fall over the lake,
but now, in the lull after picnic,

a little work sweetens the languor.
A hymn of mending to be done,
perpetual hum in work clothes

at tool benches. Hum of a.m. radio,
hum of a job well done. Grinding
a machine file, a drill-and-electric-saw job.

A thirst for work, ground down waterless.
A quenchable need to shape for use.
Thirst to be finished, to restart, to righten.

Salt of drive. Of worn hammers
ready to drive home. The well-driven nail,
head flush with board. The carpenter's tools

love the carpenter at work. In the shade,
a yellow mug full of root beer waits,
slowly forms a ring of sweat on the workbench.

The ice cubes melt away, ebbing as tasked.
The machine needs to be tended. Runs all afternoon.
Salt added to sweet drone of memory.

When the ice cream is ready,
we may scoop it into mugs for floats,
sweetness brought to sweetness.

Sip, then sneak a dribble of salt
from the side of the metal churn.
Root, it speaks of origins.

ATTENDANT

The flight attendant's neat sideburns
suggest an engineer's tool
used to draw their perfect curves.

In his little jet-powered chapel,
it is time for communion.
Above the hum of the engine,
he blesses the heavy tray,

made for troubled times,
its liturgy locked until needed.
He pauses before each seat.

"Take this," he offers,
his gaze lingering on my face.

When our plane begins to shake over Kansas,
he comforts us. He thanks us for our faith in flight,
gives benediction.
Says, "Your grandfather is waiting at the gate."

TO(TO)

Not Toto, To.
Girl stuttered it
and it stuck to
black scrub barker-
at-lions, straw
sniffer, tiny heart
tin-man-sized. One
lick would lick the witch,
stick-skinny one,
poppy-scented
bicycle basket
rustler. Her stiff
lines smearable.

No dreams other
than to keep on
going. Whirled through
the binary
smells of verdant Oz.
He will not share
his mobile dreams
with mere munchkins.
From his little
emerald bed,
he turns three times
and thinks of aiming
his nose to— to—

DRIED POPPY

A thousand thousand
brittle fictions
rattle in a former flower.
Wasp-spit nest,
the hollow seedpod
colored Kansas sepia,
the miniature
storm cellar
where Dorothy Gale's
asleep inside, pent up
in a field of stories.
Untraveled golden ways,
unspent potential.
Rasped dreams
of future summers.

DOROTHY THINKS OF OZ, THE GREAT AND POWERFUL, AT CHRISTMAS

Without anyone to reinforce aging gilded chairs,
to operate levers behind a curtain,
to check the light bulbs for broken filaments,
or to place the candles in the highest windows,
Christmas is muted. Darkness looms, over-large.
Nothing is to scale. No one asks for reasons
we've traveled or demands a quest's satisfying souvenir.
No one doles out odd and mechanical solutions.
Worse, nobody produces science enough for ascension.
Now the green grows frowsy, the emerald mending idles.
Fractures widen in the golden road almost as if, any day now,
we'll sink like bricks back into a mossy primordial path.

FROM THE SCAFFOLD

She paints in the scale of memory,
makes sure her grandfather is positioned
to keep his eye on the churchgoers processing
up the aisle, through the years.

She spent a week on her grandmother's
strong right arm, muscular and youthful still,
perfecting in detail how she carried her
on her hip when she was a child.

Now, as she gazes up at that face,
the figure is large enough to stoop
to reach the brushes
which sometimes fall from her fingers
and clatter far down below.

SKETCHING FROM LIFE

First, she asks us to draw the cut tulip in the vase,
to draw it from under and above, to turn it in our minds
so that we are viewing the sun through its long veins,
so that we imagine it ascending unroped, unmanned into the sky.

Then she asks us to draw it growing in a field among
one million bright brothers and sisters, swaying undisturbed
by the strokes of our pencils.

Next she has us offer it to a stranger on a subway, or lightly trace
the movement of a tulip on a high wire. She asks us to introduce
the tulip to Chihuly, to remind him of the fragility of the tulip,
what it knows of waiting in the darkness.

She asks us to take the tulip from winter, to shade in
the grit and dirt, to imagine deer teeth rooting and gnawing.
To imagine a spring without tulips.

She asks us to draw the tulip in a field where it doesn't belong:
make a grid of orange cups ordering a mall parking lot
or a lone red in a stippled, yellow sea of daffodils.

She asks us to cut it for our grandmother, to place it in a juice bottle
on the kitchen counter or in the plastic water pitcher on a hospital tray.

Now we're supposed to draw just the petals, splayed or fallen;
first their tender, vivid cups,
then the straight line bruise of a fallen stick
scraping the petals, folding them.

We're to close our eyes and draw it without looking,
get down on the page the memory of its scent.
She asks us to view the stamen as
arms, to ask ourselves what the arms want.
To sketch the answer.

APPENDIX G

Fig. 701: *Vogue* dressmaker's pattern. Eleven straight pins hold together the pattern from the fifties; housewife, pearls and heels, and roast chicken not included.

Fig. 731: Oil stain on smooth, cement garage floor. Shaped just like the profile of your great grandma's cameo brooch—that one pale, this one dark, both ladies typically displayed on weekends.

Fig. 752: Wax envelope containing a curling lock of red hair, labeled "Barb," dated 19—.

APPENDIX H

Fig. 118: A silk scarf painted with a map. Unrolled, but not yet straightened over the table so that the rivers and mountains are shadowed in cobalt ink.

Fig. 120: A question posed in an airplane while scanning the landscape: *Which of the lakes is mine?*

NOTES

Text from epigraph is from the home page of the American Association of Variable Star Observers, <http://www.aavso.org/variables-what-are-they-and-why-observe-them>.

Texts from the second epigraph are from *Sea and Sky Presents' Quotes about Stars*, found at <http://www.seasky.org/quotes/space-quotes-stars.html>.

CURRICULUM VITAE

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